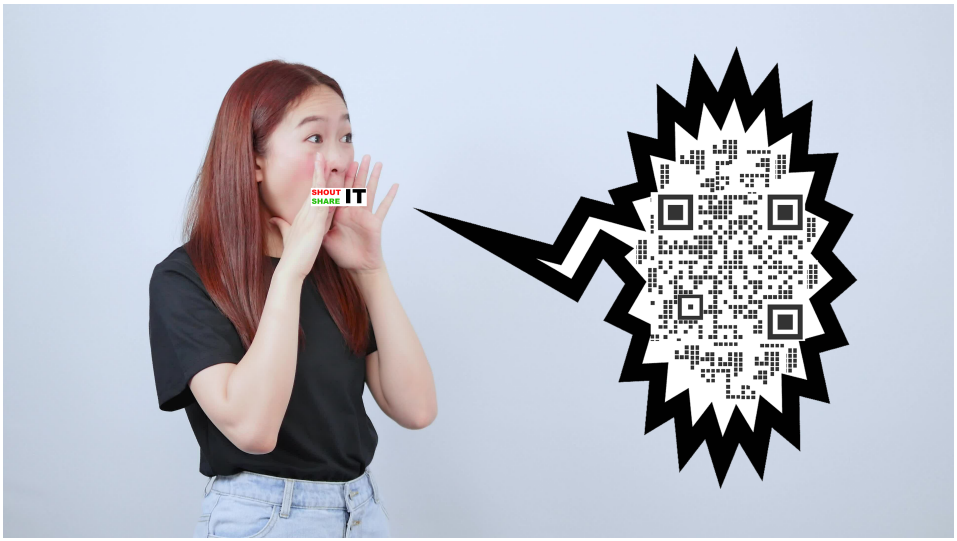
Asimov's Guide To Shakespear. Volume 1

Isaac Asimov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Asimov's Guide To Shakespear

whatISAAC ASIMOV

Volume One

The Greek, Roman, and Italian Plays

Introduction

Those of us who speak English as our native tongue can count a number of blessings. It is a widespread language that is understood by more people in more parts of the world than any other [Chinese has more speakers than English, but it is understood on a large scale only in eastern and southeastern Asia] and it is therefore the language that is most nearly an open door to all peoples.

Its enormous vocabulary and its relatively simple grammar give it un-equaled richness and flexibility and more than make up for its backward spelling. Its hospitality to idiomatic phrases and to foreign words gives it a colorful and dramatic quality that is without peer.

But most of all, we who speak English can read, in the original, the writings of William Shakespeare, a man who is certainly the supreme writer through all the history of English literature and who, in the opinion of many, is the greatest writer who ever lived-in *any* language.

Indeed, so important are Shakespeare's works that only the Bible can compare with them in their influence upon our language and thought. Shakespeare has said so many things so supremely well that we are forever finding ourselves thinking in his terms. (There is the story of the woman who read *Hamlet* for the first tune and said, "I don't see why people admire that play so. It is nothing but a bunch of quotations strung together.")

I have a feeling that Shakespeare has even acted as a brake on the development of English. Before his time, English was developing so rapidly that the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, written shortly before 1400, had become unreadably archaic, two centuries later, to the Englishmen of Shakespeare's time. Yet now, after three and a half centuries, Shakespeare's plays can be read quite easily and with only an occasional archaic word or phrase requiring translation. It is almost as though the English language dare not change so much as to render Shakespeare incomprehensible. That would be an unacceptable price to pay for change.

In this respect, Shakespeare is even more important than the Bible. The King James version of the Bible is, of course, only a translation, although a supremely great one. If it becomes archaic there is nothing to prevent newer translations into more modern English. Indeed, such newer translations exist.

How, though, can anyone ever dream of "translating" Shakespeare into "modern English"? That would do, perhaps, if one were merely interested in the contents of Shakespeare. (It is, by analogy, in the contents of the Bible that we are interested, not in its exact syllables.)

But who can bear to have nothing more than the contents of Shakespeare's plays? What translation, even merely from one form of English into another form, could possibly reproduce the exact music and thunder of Shakespeare's syllables, and without that-

Yet in one respect Shakespeare recedes from us no matter how faithfully we follow the very syllables he uses. He wrote for all time, yes (whether he knew it or not), but he also wrote for a specific audience, that of Elizabethan Englishmen and -women. He gave its less educated individuals the horseplay and slapstick they enjoyed, and he gave its more educated individuals a wealth of allusion.

He assumed the educated portion of the audience were thoroughly grounded in Greek and Roman mythology and history, since that was part (and, indeed, almost the whole) of the classical education of the upper classes of the time. He assumed, also, that they were well acquainted with England's own history and with the geography of sixteenth-century Europe.

Modern Americans, however, are for the most part only vaguely aware of Greek mythology or Roman history. If anything, they are even less aware of those parts of English history with which Shakespeare deals.

This is not to say that one cannot enjoy Shakespeare without knowing the historical, legendary, or mythological background to the events in his plays. There is still the great poetry and the deathless swing of his writing. -And yet, if we *did* know a little more of what that writing was *about,* would not the plays take on new dimensions and lend us still greater enjoyment?

This is what it is in my mind to do in this book.

It is not my intention to discuss the literary values of the plays, or to analyze them from a theatrical, philosophical, or psychological point of view. Others have done this far beyond any poor capacity I might have in that direction.

What I can do, however, is to go over each of the thirty-eight plays and two narrative poems written by Shakespeare in his quarter century of literary life, and explain, as I go along, the historical, legendary, and mythological background.

In the process, I will, in some places, spend many pages on a single short speech which requires a great deal of background knowledge for its proper *total* appreciation. I may, in other places, skip quickly through whole acts which require nothing more than an understanding of a few archaic words to be crystal clear. (On the whole, I shall make no attempt to translate simple archaisms. This is done, quite adequately, in any briefly annotated edition of Shakespeare.)

In dealing with the plays, I will quote whatever passage inspires

an explanation, but I will quote very little else. If the reader is reasonably familiar with a particular play, he will be able to read through the chapter devoted to it without needing to refer to the play itself. If he is *not* familiar with a particular play, it would probably help to keep it at hand for possible reference.

One matter over which I hesitated for a considerable length of time was the question of the order of presentation of the plays. The traditional order, as found in most editions of Shakespeare's collected works, groups the comedies first, then the histories, then the tragedies. This traditional order is very far removed from the order in which the plays were written. Thus, *The Tempest,* which is the first play in the ordinary editions, is the last play that Shakespeare wrote without collaboration. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* which is next, is one of the earliest.

It is possible to prepare an edition in which the plays are presented roughly in the order of their writing, something of value to those who study Shakespeare's developing techniques and ideas. This order can only be rough because it is not always certain in exactly which year a particular play was written. Worse yet, placing the plays in the chronological order of writing disrupts the histories and places them out of order as far as the historical events they deal with are concerned.

Since I am chiefly interested in this book in the historical, legendary, and mythological background of the events described in the various plays, I have decided to place the plays in the chronological order of those historical events as far as possible.

To begin with, I divide the plays into four broad groups: Greek, Roman, Italian, and English.

The Greek plays will include those that have their basis in Greek legend, as for instance, *Troilus and Cressida;* or in Greek history (however faintly), as *Timon of Athens.* It will also, however, include pure romances, with no claim whatever to any historical value, except that the background is arbitrarily set in a time we recognize as Greek-as *The Winter's Tale.*

The Roman plays include those that are based on actual history, as *Julius Caesar,* or on utterly non-historical, but Rome-based, inventiveness, as *Titus Andronicus.* (As it happens, even historical fiction such as *The Winter's Tale* and *Titus Andronicus* can be faintly related to actual historical events. No fiction writer is an island and no matter how he tries to draw on his imagination alone, the real world *will* intrude.)

The Italian plays are those set in a Renaissance Italian setting (or in nearby places such as France, Austria, or Illyria) which cannot be pinned down to any specific period of time. I will present the plays in

this section in the order in which Shakespeare (as best we can tell) wrote them.

The English plays include not only the sober historical plays such as *Richard II* or *Henry V,* but also those which deal with the legendary period of English history before the Norman conquest or even, in the case of *King Lear* and *Cymbeline,* before the Roman conquest.

There is some overlapping. The Greek plays set latest in time are later than the earliest Roman plays; and the latest Roman plays are later than the earliest English plays. The radical difference in scene, however, makes it convenient to ignore this slight chronological inconsistency. With that out of the way, the order of plays and narrative poems in this volume will carry us through some twenty-eight centuries of history, from the time of legendary Greece before the Trojan War, to Shakespeare's own time.

To make a reasonably even division of the book into two volumes, the Greek, Roman, and Italian plays-in that order-will be grouped into Volume One. This will leave the English plays, to which I have devoted a little more than half the book, to form Volume Two.

In preparing this book, I have made as much use as I could of all sorts of general reference books: encyclopedias, atlases, mythologies, biographical dictionaries, histories-whatever came to hand.

To one set of books, however, I owe an especial debt. These are the many volumes of "The Signet Classic Shakespeare" (General Editor, Sylvan Barnet, published by New American Library, New York). It was, as a matter of fact, while reading my pleasurable way through these volumes that the notion of *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* occurred to me.

Part I. Greek

1. Venus And Adonis

Of all Shakespeare's writings, *Venus and Adonis* is the most straightforwardly mythological and traces farthest backward (if only dimly so) in history. For that reason, I will begin with it.

> Earl of Southampton

"Venus and Adonis" bears a dedication:

> To the Right Honourable Henry Wriothesley, Earl of South ampton, and Baron of Tichfield.

-Dedication

Southampton was a well-educated youth of considerable wealth, who was presented at the court of Queen Elizabeth I in 1590, while he was still a boy in his teens. He quickly became a generous patron of poets, Shakespeare among them.

It is suggested that one of Shakespeare's early plays, *Love's Labor's Lost* (see page I-421) was written for a premiere performance at Southampton's house before an assemblage of his friends and guests. If so, the play must have pleased Southampton tremendously; his patronage to Shakespeare extended (so at least one report goes) to the gift of a thousand pounds-an enormous sum in those days-for the completion of some purchase. Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that Shakespeare made his dedication to *Venus and Adonis* florid, indeed.

Nevertheless, considering that we know Shakespeare as a transcendent genius, and that Southampton was merely a rich young man who was no more than twenty years old when *Venus and Adonis* was published, there is something unpleasantly sycophantic about the dedication. Shakespeare pretends to worry, for instance-

> — how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burthen;

-Dedication

Can he really doubt his own power so, or overestimate the young man so egregiously? Surely not. Can he be indulging in sarcasm? That would be foolishly risky and nothing in Shakespeare's career would

lead us to suppose him a devil-may-care. He was rather the reverse.

Well then, is he merely buttering up a patron with a fat money belt? Perhaps so. It is easy to believe that this is the ordinary language of poets to patrons but it would still hurt us to suppose that Shakespeare would conform to so degrading a custom.

But, to be complete, it is also possible that there was a homosexual attachment and Shakespeare was writing out of love. This is possible. Some think most of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets were written in this period of his life; most of them seem addressed to a young man, possibly (but not certainly) to Southampton [Shakespeare's sonnets, and a handful of other short poems attributed to him, are not taken up in this book. They are primarily emotional and personal, with little or none of the type of background I am dealing with here.]. The twentieth sonnet seems to have the frankest homosexual content. It begins:

> A woman's face, with Nature's own hand painted, Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;

—lines 1-2

But it denies overt homosexuality, ending:

> And for a woman wert thou first created,
> Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting
> And by addition me of thee defeated
> By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
> But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
> Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

—lines 9-14

In addition, there are a number of events in Shakespeare's plays that can be interpreted from a homosexual point of view, yet which Shakespeare presents most sympathetically. There are the close male friendships, even to threatened death, as is Antonio's for Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* (see page I-501). There is Lucius' passion for Fidele in *Cymbe-line* (see page II-72) and the scene in which Orlando woos Ganymede in *As You Like It* (see page I-571).

But too little is known of Shakespeare's life to go any further than this. Any speculations as to his homosexual urges and to the extent to which he gave in to them, if they existed, can never be anything more than speculations.

… the first heir of my invention …

Shakespeare goes on to say, in his dedication,

> … if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather…

—Dedication

Venus and Adonis was published about April 1593, at which time Shakespeare was just twenty-nine. He had already established himself as a competent actor and had probably done considerable patching of old plays; notably *Henry VI, Part One* (see page II-640). *Henry VI, Part Two* and *Henry VI, Part Three* were mostly or entirely his and it is possible he had already written two comedies: *The Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labor's Lost.* It is even possible that two more plays, *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III* were in the process of production.

These works, however, were meant to be played, not read, and it was to be years before they were actually published. *Venus and Adonis* was the first piece of Shakespeare's writings that actually appeared in print, and it was in that sense only "the first heir of my invention."

Shakespeare seems, by the way, to have turned to narrative poetry only because of a siege of enforced idleness. The London theaters were closed between mid-1592 and mid-1594 as a result of a heightened incidence of plagues, and Shakespeare used the additional time on his hands to write *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece.*

Rose-cheek'd Adonis...

The poem begins early in the day, with Adonis making ready to hunt:

> Even as the sun with purple-colour'd face Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
> Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase. Hunting he lov'd, but love he laugh'd to scorn.

—lines 1-4

Adonis is the Greek version of a Semitic vegetation god. From the beginnings of agriculture, there must have been a kind of relief each year among the farmers that, after the death of vegetation in the fall, there was a rebirth in the spring. Rituals personifying this death-and-rebirth were invented and they must have been looked upon as a kind of flattering homage to Nature (or even as a hint to a possibly forgetful Nature), inducing her to continue. The feeling would surely arise at last that only a thorough-going carrying through of the ritual each year would bring about a fertile growing season and a good harvest, and upon that, life through the barren winter would depend.

In that sense, the type of myth of which the tale of Venus and Adonis is representative (though prettied-up from its straightforward origins by the sophisticated imaginations of the later classical poets), reflects the historic birth of agriculture. It can be tied to the great event, some seven thousand years before the Trojan War, that saw the first deliberate cultivation and harvest of wild grain in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains in what is now western Iran.

The Sumerians, about 2000 b.c., represented the agricultural cycle with a god, Dumu-zi, who died and was resurrected; a death-and-resurrection which was celebrated each year by the people of the land. The myth and the ritual were adopted by the later Babylonians and Assyrians-the Semitic peoples who succeeded the Sumerians in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates. In the Semitic language of Babylonia, the name of the vegetation god became Tammuz.

In the Tammuz myth, the god descends into the underworld after his death and all vegetation dies with him. A wailing goddess (variously described as his sister, mother, or wife) manages to rescue him. In the most familiar form of the myth, the rescuer is Ishtar, his wife or love.

The passionate rites for Tammuz were exceedingly attractive to women in particular. They found emotional relief in the wailing and utter grief that symbolized Tammuz' death and in the almost orgiastic joy that came when the priests raised the cry that he was reborn.

The stern prophets of Israel had a hard job keeping the Israelite women from joining in this pagan rite. The tale of Jephthah's daughter was possibly an attempt to solve the problem by converting the rite into a patriotic commemoration. The Israelite general Jephthah had beaten the enemy, after making a rash vow to sacrifice the first living thing that came to greet him on his return. It turned out to be his daughter, whom he sacrificed. The Bible goes on to explain: "And it was a custom in Israel, That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year" (Judges 11:39-40).

If so, this pious wile did not work. Ezekiel, at the time of the

Judean exile in Babylon, enumerated the sins of the Jews of the time and said that in the very Temple in Jerusalem "there sat women weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:14).

And in one way, Tammuz has remained in Jewish consciousness ever since. The Babylonians named a month in honor of the god and the exiled Jews, in adopting the Babylonian calendar, adopted the month too. Even today, one of the months of the Jewish calendar (falling in the latter half of June and the earlier half of July) is called Tammuz.

The rites of a dead-and-resurrected God occur in the Greek myths too.

There is the case of Demeter (the grain goddess), whose daughter, Persephone, is abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld. While Persephone is gone, all grain withers, but finally Demeter manages to rescue her daughter under conditions that allow herself and Hades to share her, each for part of the year. The Eleusinian Mysteries, secret religious rites among the Greeks, seem to have involved the celebration of this death-and-resurrection, expanding it to include the resurrection of the human soul after the death of the human body.

As the Greeks and the Semites of the East gained more and more in the way of cultural interchange, the Tammuz version entered Greek mythology directly. Tammuz became Adonis.

The name shift is no mystery. Names of gods are always a little difficult to handle in any culture that considers the name of an object to be almost the equivalent of the object itself. To touch the name with one's own tongue and breath is a form of blasphemy and so circumlocutions are used. Instead of saying Tammuz, one says Lord (just as, in the Bible, Lord is used in place of Yahveh).

The Semitic term for "Lord" is "Adonai" and it was "Adonai," rather than "Tammuz," that was adopted by the Greeks. They added the final *s,* which is an almost invariable ending on Greek proper names, making it "Adonis."

Since Ishtar was the lover of Tammuz in the Babylonian myth, the equivalent of Ishtar would have to be the lover of Adonis in the Greek myth. The Greek equivalent of Ishtar was Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty.

The Greek myth had Adonis born the son of King Theias of Assyria. No such king existed in actual history, to be sure, but this is a hint of the Babylonian origin of the myth. We might suppose, therefore, that the scene of the poem is Babylonia, though Shakespeare never indicates any particular place-and perhaps gave the matter no thought at all.

Adonis' mother was Myrrha, who was herself the daughter of Theias. Myrrha had conceived an incestuous passion for her father and

managed to sneak into his bed, with the result that she became pregnant by him. When the shocked father discovered the truth, he would have killed her, but the pitying gods changed her into the myrrh tree.

The myrrh tree yields a bitter resinous sap (myrrh), which oozes out when the bark is split. (The word "myrrh" is from an Arabic word meaning "bitter.") The sap is valued for its uses as incense and in cosmetics and embalming. (It was one of the three gifts brought to the infant Jesus by the wise men-"they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh," Matthew 2:11.)

The sap on being exposed to air hardens into resinous drops called "tears," and these are supposed to represent the tears of Myrrha over the terrible thing she had done. (Working backward, we can suppose that this part of the myth arose over the attempt to explain why a tree should seem to weep.)

In the Greek myth, the myrrh tree into which Myrrha had been changed split after nine months, and the infant Adonis emerged. Aphrodite (who had inspired Myrrha's fatal love in the first place) felt remorse at the event and rescued Adonis. She placed him in a box and gave him to Persephone, goddess of the underworld, for temporary safekeeping. Persephone, noting the beauty of the child, refused to give him back and there was a quarrel that ended with each having him part of the time.

Here again is the tale of whiter (Adonis with Persephone) and summer (Adonis with Aphrodite), enlivened, in the Greek way, by a story of forbidden love.

This, at least, is the myth as told by Apollodorus, an Athenian poet who lived in the second century b.c. Shakespeare does not follow this. He begins with Adonis as a grown man, says nothing of his origins, and concerns himself only with the final stage of the myth, following a version given by Ovid.

Ovid, who seems to have been Shakespeare's favorite classical author, is the Roman poet whose name in full was Publius Ovidius Naso. About a.d. 1 he was writing his most famous work-a version, in Latin verse, of those Greek myths that involved the transformation ("metamorphosis") of one living thing into another.

Ovid's book is therefore called *Metamorphoses,* and the myth of Adonis is included, since his mother had been turned into a myrrh tree.

Sick-tkoughted Venus…

In the final couplet of the first stanza, Shakespeare introduces the other member of the mythical duo:

> Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him And like a bold-fac'd suitor gins to woo him.

—lines 5-6

This is not Aphrodite, notice, as it would be if Shakespeare were following the work of the Greek poet Apollodorus. Shakespeare is using the name of a Roman goddess instead, the name used by Ovid.

The Romans in the early centuries of their history had a primitive religion, with numerous gods and goddesses of a rather arid nature who were not to be compared with the sophisticated deities of the much more cultivated Greeks. From the third century b.c. onward, the Romans fell more and more under the spell of Greek culture and were impelled to adopt the beautiful and intricate Greek mythology. They could not very well drop their own deities; instead they compromised by identifying their own gods with the roughly corresponding gods of the Greeks and retold the Greek myths using the Roman names.

Here is a list of the chief gods and goddesses in their Roman and Greek versions:

Roman Greek
Jupiter Zeus chief of the gods
Juno Hera his wife
Minerva Athena goddess of wisdom and practical arts
Diana Artemis goddess of the moon and the hunt
Mercury Hermes messenger of the gods
Mars Ares god of war
Vulcan Hephaestus god of fire and the forge
Venus Aphrodite goddess of love and beauty
Neptune Poseidon god of the sea
Vesta Hestia goddess of the hearth and home
Dis Hades god of the underworld
Ceres Demeter goddess of grain and agriculture
Proserpina Persephone goddess of the underworld

One major god had, apparently, no Roman equivalent at all, which is not strange, for he was the most Greek of all the Greek gods. He was Apollo, the god of youth and the fine arts (and in later poetry, of the sun as well). The Romans used the Greek name, therefore. They also used Hades or, its equivalent, Pluto, in preference to their own

Dis, since Dis (a fearsome underground deity) was not popular with them and they avoided naming him.

Two of the mortal heroes that people the Greek legends, and who play a prominent part in Shakespearean allusions, have altered names given them by the Romans. Thus, the greatest and strongest of all the Greek heroes was Heracles, but the Romans called him Hercules. Again, the wiliest of the Greeks at the siege of Troy was Odysseus, whom the Romans called Ulysses.

In medieval Europe the Greek myths reached the west only through such Roman filters as Ovid and therefore the names used were all Roman. Shakespeare uses the Roman names of the gods invariably.

I will conform to Shakespearean usage, though it goes against the grain to do so, since it is far more appropriate to use the Greek names in dealing with Greek myths. I will ease my conscience, therefore, by occasionally placing the Greek name in parentheses, just to remind the reader of its existence.

Shakespeare departs from his source material in one important way. He makes Adonis reluctant to respond to Venus. "Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn" and Venus, out of sheer necessity, must reverse the role of the sexes and "like a bold-fac'd suitor" be the aggressor.

There is precedent for this in Greek mythology. There was, for instance, Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. He was beloved by a fountain nymph, Salmacis, but he repulsed her coldly. Once, however, when he was bathing in her spring, she was able to unite with bun hi love, and fearing that she might never be able to repeat the act, prayed the gods that she might remain united with him physically forever.

Her prayer was granted and thereafter Hermaphroditus had the genital equipment of both sexes. The word "hermaphrodite" has, in consequence, entered the English language to represent that pathological bisexual condition.

A much better known example is mentioned by Venus herself in this poem. She complains of Adonis' coldness and accuses him of loving only himself. She warns him he runs risks in consequence, saying:

> Narcissus so himself himself forsook, And died to kiss his shadow in the brook.

—lines 161-62

The tale of Narcissus begins with a nymph, Echo, who had, at Jupiter's orders, kept Juno busy with prolonged and idle gossip while Jupiter busied himself with various nymphs. When Juno found out, she punished Echo by depriving her of her voice-except that she was permitted to repeat the last words of anything said to her.

Unhappy Echo fell in love, thereafter, with Narcissus, a handsome youth who would love no one. She tried to woo him, but could only repeat his last words, and he fled from her impatiently, so that Echo pined away until only her voice was left.

And then one day Narcissus came across a clear spring in which he saw his own face. He had never seen his face before and, staring at it now, fell in love with it. He attempted to woo it, but the shadow could not respond and, in effect, rejected him, so that "himself himself forsook." Attempting, finally, to kiss his shadow, Narcissus drowned, and he too added a word to our language-"narcissism," the morbid love of one's self.

This trick of having Adonis cold to Venus gives Shakespeare a chance to turn his poetic powers to a less hackneyed motif than that of a man's praise of womanly beauty. He can turn to the harder and less familiar task of a woman's praise of manly beauty.

Then too, if we go along with the homosexual component of Shakespeare, it may be significant that a poem dedicated to young Southampton features the prolonged praise of manly beauty and a prolonged pleading for a love that is not, and cannot, be given.

> … god of war

Venus points out that she is rarely refused when she asks for love:

> "I have been wooed, as I entreat thee now, Even by the stern and direful god of war,

—lines 97-98

One of the most famous tales of Venus/Aphrodite is her love affair with Mars/Ares. The tale is told in the *Odyssey* (Homer's epic poem concerning the voyages of Odysseus), in which Venus is pictured as married to Vulcan/Hephaestus, the ugly and lame smith god. Venus is, under these conditions, quite ready to respond to the wooing of Mars.

Vulcan, suspecting that Venus is being unfaithful, rigged up a device whereby an unbreakable net could fall upon the bed and catch

Venus and Mars in the position of love. This was done; Mars and Venus were helplessly bound together while the angry Vulcan called in the other gods to witness his wife's criminal behavior. Unfortunately for himself, the reaction of the gods was not one of sympathy for Vulcan, but rather of envy for Mars.

And Titan …

By now, the sun was high in the sky:

> And Titan, tired in the midday heat,
> With burning eye did hotly overlook them,
> Wishing Adonis had his team to guide,
> So he were like him, and by Venus' side.

—lines 177-80

In the Greek myths, Jupiter/Zeus and his fellow deities had not always ruled the universe. Before them had been a race of older gods whom they supplanted. (Perhaps this is a reflection in myth of the supercession of the pre-Greeks of the Balkan peninsula by the invading Greek tribes.)

These older gods were called Titans, and their chief was Cronus, whom the Romans called Saturn.

The Titan who served as the god of the sun was Hyperion. One way of saying this, mythologically, was to make him the father of Helios (the Greek word for "sun"). Both "Hyperion" and "Helios" are thus used in classic-minded literature to represent the sun. Since both are considered Titans, the sun can be called, as here, "Titan."

The sun was always pictured as a blazing, golden chariot, driven by a team of wild, fiery horses. It is with this in mind that Shakespeare pictures the "Titan" as wishing Adonis held the reins and he himself were lying by Venus.

In later Greek poetry, Apollo was made the god of the sun, and Shakespeare, in the course of his writing, uses "Apollo" to symbolize the sun too. The Titaness Phoebe, a sister of Hyperion, was the goddess of the moon, and the myths make Apollo a grandson (on his mother's side) of Phoebe. He inherits the ancient name in its masculine form, then, and is called Phoebus or Phoebus Apollo, "Phoebus" too is used by Shakespeare to represent the sun.

Thy mermaid's voice …

Adonis is only irritated by Venus' pleadings. While she keeps him back from the hunt with her attempted love-making, his stallion spies a mare and breaks loose. Adonis fails to recapture him and petulantly scolds Venus, blaming her for the loss.

Venus laments that she suffers twice, first because he will not speak to her, and second because when at last he does, it is to scold her. She says:

> Thy mermaid's voice hath done me double wrong;

—line 429

The Greeks had, in their myths, tales of beautiful young women, called sirens, who rested on the rocks of a seashore and sang in heavenly voices. Sailors passing by would be attracted by them and, steering their boats nearer, would meet death upon the rocks.

Originally sirens may have been wind spirits carrying off the souls of the dead, and were sometimes pictured with birds' bodies. However, the wind was more deadly on sea than on land, and the sirens became more and more closely associated with the sea until they were pictured as creatures who were women down to the waist and fish below that.

These are the "mermaids" ("sea-maids"), who bewitch sailors to their doom on the rocks, as they sit combing their long hair and singing. The famous German poem "Die Lorelei" is of such a creature.

So when Venus speaks of Adonis' "mermaid voice" she means a beautiful voice that is luring her to doom.

> … worse than Tantalus'.. .

The day is drawing to a close and Adonis finally manages to get Venus to promise to leave him alone if he kisses her. He proceeds to do so but she returns the embrace in such full measure that he has all he can do to disengage himself. He then reveals that the next day he intends to hunt boar.

At this Venus is sent into a paroxysm of fear, lest he be killed in so dangerous a pursuit. She seizes him and they fall to the ground in the very position of love. Yet even so, to Venus' frustration, he will do nothing.

That worse than Tantalus' is her annoy To clip Elysium and to lack her joy.

—lines 599-600

Tantalus was a Peloponnesian king who was an intimate friend of Jupiter and the other gods. He was admitted to their feasts and in return he invited them to his house. For some reason, perhaps to test their divine knowledge, he served them the flesh of his own son when they were feasting at his house. The gods were horrified. They restored the son to life, and, for his detestable crime, Tantalus was killed by Jupiter's lightning bolt. What's more, Tantalus was sent to Tartarus, the region beneath Hades where particularly wicked people were specially punished.

Tantalus' punishment was to stand in water up to his neck in eternal frustration. He was consumed by thirst, but every time he stooped to drink, the water swirled downward. Fruit-laden branches hovered temptingly near and he was famished, but every time he reached to snatch a fruit, it whisked away. It is from this that the word "tantalize" is derived.

For Venus, to have Adonis exactly where he ought to be and yet have him make no use of the fact seems a frustration worse than that of Tantalus. She was in Tartarus, even though she was "clipping" (holding) Elysium, which was the Greek version of Paradise.

In the Homeric writings, Elysium or "the Elysian plain" existed in the far west, the dimly explored (and therefore wonder-filled) western regions of the Mediterranean Sea, where heroes were taken after death to live in eternal bliss. By later writers this had to be transported beyond the ocean rim, for explorers reached the westernmost point of the Mediterranean shores without finding Elysium. The Greek poet Hesiod, writing a century after Homer, speaks of "the Islands of the Blest" lying out in the Atlantic.

As geographic knowledge continued to broaden, the Roman poet Vergil, writing six centuries after Hesiod, was forced to move Elysium underground, making it a portion of Hades devoted to delight. It was suffused with an eternal spring. Its flowers, groves, and fountains were lit by soft sunshine during the day and by the familiar constellations at night. Then the righteous, resting on banks of resilient and perfumed flowers, lived in never-ending felicity.

… modest Dian ...

Venus urges Adonis to hunt foxes or hares, anything that is not dangerous, rather than boars. Adonis, having paid his kiss, finds that he still cannot disengage himself from her wild grasp. It is night already and he is annoyed at this, for it will be hard to find his way. Venus turns this too into praise of Adonis' beauty.

> So do thy lips
> Make modest Dian cloudy and forlorn,
> Lest she should steal a kiss and die forsworn.
> Now of this dark night I perceive the reason:
> Cynthia for shame obscures her silver shine,

—lines 724-28

The Titaness who served as goddess of the moon was Phoebe. However, Hyperion, the Titan god of the sun, had not only Helios as a son but Selene as a daughter. "Selene" is the Greek word for "moon" and that name was the most common mythological representation of the moon.

The later poets, however, transferred the duty of serving as goddess of the moon to Diana/Artemis, the sister of Apollo. She is also called Cynthia because she was supposed to have been born on a mountain called Cynthus on a small island in the Aegean Sea. Apollo is therefore, but much less frequently, called Cynthius.

Diana is, of all the Greek goddesses, the most insistently virgin. Venus therefore says that Adonis may lose his way or trip because the night is dark; and the night is dark because the moon hides herself, lest while shining on Adonis' beautiful face she be unable to resist kissing him, thus ruining her rigid chastity.

> A purple flower...

Venus' urgings are all in vain. The next day he hunts the boar and is slain. The horrified Venus finds him:

> And in his blood, that on the ground lay spill'd
> A purple flower sprung up, check'red with white,
> Resembling well his pale cheeks and the blood
> 'Which in round drops upon their whiteness stood.

—lines 1167-70

The flower that arose out of the blood, according to the myth, was the anemone, and its appearance makes a second reason why the tale qualifies for inclusion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

This is not the only flower that was supposed to have originated out of the blood of a mortal loved by a god.

There was the case, for instance, of a beautiful Spartan prince, Hya-cinthus, with whom Apollo fell in love. (The Greeks had a tolerant and even approving attitude toward male homosexuality, and the Greek gods indulged in it too.) The West Wind was also in love with Hyacinthus and when Apollo and Hyacinthus were exercising by throwing the discus, the West Wind, out of jealousy, blew the discus against the boy's head, killing him. From the blood of Hyacinthus sprang the hyacinth, which carries on its petals markings that look like the first two letters of the name of Hyacinthus (in Greek), two letters which, coincidentally, mean "woe."

… to Paphos. ..

Shakespeare's version of the story ends there, with the disastrous climax of Adonis' death. The last, and 199th, stanza, reads:

> Thus weary of the world, away she hies
> And yokes her silver doves, by whose swift aid
> Their mistress, mounted, through the empty skies «
> In her light chariot quickly is convey'd,
> Holding their course to Paphos, where their queen
> Means to immure herself and not be seen.

—lines 1189-94

The doves, for their amorous dispositions, their whiteness and gentleness, are fitting representations of romantic love and are therefore associated with Venus. Shakespeare makes a number of allusions to her doves in the course of his writings.

Paphos is a town on the western shore of the island of Cyprus, a town particularly dedicated to the worship of Venus. She is sometimes called the "Paphian goddess" as a result and sometimes "Cypris."

In the Greek myth, however, the tale of Adonis does not end with his death and Venus' mourning. In the proper fashion of death-and-resurrection, Venus goes to Jupiter and persuades him to make an

arrangement whereby Proserpina, queen of the underworld, can have Adonis for half the year and she for the other half. And thus, Adonis, like the vegetation god he is, dies and is resurrected each year.

2. A Midsummer Night's Dream

The title of this play sets its tone. "Midsummer" refers to the summer solstice, when the noonday sun reaches the most elevated point in the heavens. By our present calendar, this is June 21. (To be sure this is only the beginning of summer by modern convention and by temperature considerations.)

The actual calendar day of the solstice has varied at different times because calendars themselves have. The Midsummer Day in English tradition is June 24, which is celebrated as the birthday of John the Baptist and which therefore has a Christian distinction as well as an earlier pagan one. The preceding night would be "Midsummer Night."

There is a folk belief that extreme heat is a cause of madness (hence the phrase "midsummer madness") and this is not entirely a fable. The higher the sun and the longer it beats down, the more likely one is to get sunstroke, and mild attacks of sunstroke could be conducive to all sorts of hallucinatory experiences. Midsummer, then, is the time when people are most apt to imagine fantastic experiences.

In calling the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* then, Shakespeare is deliberately describing it as a piece of utter fantasy. It does *not* imply, however, that the play actually takes place on Midsummer Night. Only one reference in the play seems to set a time and that makes it seem considerably earlier; see page I-45.

> … fair Hippolyta. ..

The play opens in a spirit of high festivity. A marriage is about to take place. The scene is set in the palace of Theseus, Duke of Athens, and it is he who speaks:

> Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
> Draws on apace.
> Four happy days bring in Another moon;

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-3

Theseus was the great hero of Athens, who (according to Greek legend) was the first to unify the peninsula of Attica under the rule of the city of Athens. He was supposed to have lived in the generation

before the Trojan War and we may therefore put the time of the play as about 1230 b.c. (which makes this play the earliest from the standpoint of background chronology, so that I place it immediately after *Venus and Adonis.)*

As the centuries wore on, the imaginative Athenians invented more and more hero tales with which to adorn the life of their founder until, finally, he was second only to Hercules in the number of adventures he was given.

One tale involving Theseus concerns his expedition to a land of warrior women. The women, the legend tells us, cauterized the left breast in infancy so that it never developed and left that side free for the maneuvering of a shield. They were called "Amazons," from a Greek word meaning "breastless."

Theseus defeated the Amazons and captured their queen, Antiope, keeping her as his love. He married her and by her had a son, Hippoly-tus. The name of Hippolytus was famous in Greek legend because he was the center of a very famous tale involving the hopeless love for him of his stepmother, Phaedra.

A feminine version of Hippolytus' name, Hippolyta, worked its way backward therefore and was given to his mother in place of the older name, Antiope. This was all the easier to do because in the tale of another expedition against the Amazons, that of Hercules, Hippolyta was indeed given as the name of their queen. Shakespeare makes use of Hippolyta as the name of Theseus' Amazon queen, not only here, but also in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (see page I-56).

Theseus is listed in the cast of characters as "Duke of Athens." This is an anachronism, for Athens was not a duchy or anything analogous to it in Theseus' time. It was what we would today call a kingdom and Theseus was its king.

The title "Duke of Athens" did not, however, come out of nowhere. In 1204 a party of Crusaders from the West (overthrew the Byzantine Empire, which then ruled Greece, took and sacked its capital, Constantinople, and divided up what they could of the Empire among themselves, fashioning new states, Western style. One of these fragments was the "Duchy of Athens," which included the regions about Athens and Thebes.

The Duchy of Athens continued in existence for • two and a half centuries. Finally, in 1456, it was absorbed into the empires of the Ottoman Turks. Shakespeare's play, probably written about 1595, \was only a century and a half removed from this Duchy of Athens, and the title of "Duke" would seem a natural one to the Elizabethan audience.

Since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* centers about a wedding, since it is gay and frothy and all about love and lovers, it seems natural to

suppose that it was written for, and originally produced as, part of the entertainmerit at a wedding feast. Scholars have tried to guess which wedding it might have been and six different ones have been suggested, but none is very likely. The marriages of the two men most likely to have the use of Shakespeare's services in this way, the Earl of Southampton (see page I-3) and the Earl of Essex (Elizabeth's favorite and a great friend of Southampton), both took place in 1598, which is too late for the play.

… Cupid's strongest bow

The marriage festivities of Theseus and Hippolyta serve as the background plot, or the "frame," of the play. In the foreground are three other sets of events, Involving totally disparate groups of characters whom Shakespeare cleverly weaves together.

The first of these subplots is introduced at once, as a set of well-born Athenians break in upon Theseus. At their head is Egeus, who is vexed and annoyed because his daughter, Hermia, will not agree to marry a young man named Demetrius. Hermia insists stubbornly that she is in love with Lysander, of whom her father does not approve.

Lysander himself points out that Demetrius had previously been in love with Helena, a friend of Hermia's, and that Helena still returned that love.

All will not do. Despite Hermia's emotion and Lysander's reason, Egeus insists on having his way, as is his legal right. Theseus decides that by his own wedding day Hermia must have agreed to obey her father. The alternatives are death or lifelong celibacy. All then leave the stage, but Lysander and Hermia.

No recourse but flight seems left them. Lysander suggests that Hermia meet him in the wood outside Athens and that they flee to a rich aunt of his who lives outside Athenian territory. There they can marry.

Hermia agrees to meet him that very night, swearing to do so in a lyrical outburst of romantic vows:

/ swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,
By his best arrow with the golden head,
By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen,
When the false Troyan under sail was seen,

—Act I, scene i, lines 169-74

Cupid is the Latin version of the Greek Eros, both of whom were personifications of sexual passion. Cupid (Eros) is earliest mentioned in the works of the Greek poet Hesiod, who wrote in the eighth century b.c. There he represented the impersonal force of attraction that created all things. In later centuries Cupid was personified as a young man, then as a boy, and finally as an infant rather like the cherubs in our own art.

In the Greek myths he was given various sets of parents; Venus and Mars (see page I-11) in the best-known version. He was considered to be mischievous, of course, as anyone could see who witnesses the ridiculous events brought about by love. He was sometimes depicted as blind, since love seemed to afflict the most mismatched couples (mismatched by all standards except those clearly visible to the lovers themselves).

He was supposed to possess a bow and arrows, for the onset of love (which is sometimes sudden, or seems sudden in later reminiscence) resembles a quick arrow in the heart. In later tales, Cupid was given two types of arrows, one with a golden tip to produce love, and another with a leaden tip to produce hate. Sometimes the hate arrows were made the property of a companion deity, Anteros ("opposed to Eros").

Doves were birds sacred to Venus (see page 1-15) and they too served as appropriate vehicles for lovers' oaths.

The "Carthage queen" is a reference to one of Shakespeare's favorite personages in classical legend and one to which he often refers. She is Dido, who in 814 b.c. (according to legend), founded the North African city of Carthage, which in later centuries dominated the western Mediterranean and rivaled Rome itself.

The best-known story in connection with Dido involves the Trojan hero Aeneas. Aeneas is one of the fighters on the Trojan side who survived the destruction of Troy. Indeed, at one point in the *Iliad,* Aeneas is on the point of being destroyed by the invincible Achilles, and is saved by the intervention of the gods. The excuse is that Jupiter (Zeus) "intends that Aeneas shall rule the surviving Trojan stock, and his children's children after him."

Naturally, numerous tales were later invented that gave Aeneas adventures after the fall of Troy. Of these, the one that is best known today was not told by a Greek at all but by a Roman poet, Publius Vergilius Maro (best known among English-speaking people as Vergil). In the reign of Augustus, first of the Roman emperors, in the last decades of the first century b.c., Vergil wrote a tale, in imitation of Homer, regarding the escape of Aeneas from burning Troy and his

wanderings over the Mediterranean Sea. The epic poem he wrote was named *Aeneid* for its hero.

Eventually, Aeneas lands in Carthage and meets Queen Dido. (To be sure, the Trojan War was in 1200 b.c. and Queen Dido lived in 800 b.c., making four centuries between them, but Vergil didn't care about that and neither-if the truth be known-do we, in reading the *Aeneid.)*

Dido falls desperately in love with the handsome Trojan stranger; their love is consummated and for a moment it seems that all will be happy. But Aeneas is a "false Troyan" who betrays the Queen. The gods warn him that his divinely appointed task is to go to Italy, there to found a line which was eventually to give rise to Rome. Quietly, he sneaks away.

Dido, in despair, builds a funeral pyre on the shore, sets it on fire, and throws herself on the flames, dying with her eyes fixed on the disappearing ship. Few readers can feel any sympathy for Vergil's rather pallid hero. Despite Vergil's own attempt to make it all seem very pious of Aeneas to follow the divine dictates, our hearts are all with the injured Carthaginian and not with the scuttling Trojan. Dido has remained ever since an epitome of the betrayed woman.

Of course, it is anachronistic of Hermia to speak of Dido and Aeneas, since that took place after the Trojan War and Theseus lived before-but, again, that is a matter of little moment.

> … when Phoebe doth behold

Helena now enters. She is a bosom friend of Hermia's and the friendship has remained unbroken, apparently, even though Demetrius, whom Helena desperately loves, is as desperately wooing Hermia.

The two lovers softheartedly decide to tell Helena of their own plan of flight, in order to reassure her that the obstacle to her love of Demetrius will be removed. Lysander says their flight will take place:

> Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
> Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass

—Act I, scene i, lines 209-10

Phoebe is a way of referring to the moon, making use of the oldest moon goddess in classical myth and harking back to the Titaness (see page I-12).

It is odd, though, that Lysander should refer to the moon as

lighting up the night, for at the very beginning of the play, Theseus has specifically stated that it is only four nights to the next new moon. This means that the old moon is now a crescent which appears only in the hours immediately preceding the dawn.

Yet it is to be understood that the entire magic night that is soon to follow is moonlit. In a way, it is essential. The soft moonlight will be just enough to make things seem not quite what they are. Who would argue with it? Let there be a full moon throughout the night even if astronomy says it is impossible.

Of course, the kindly motive that led Hermia and Lysander to tell Helena their plans makes trouble at once. Helena, virtually mad with love, promptly tells Demetrius of the plan, hoping thereby to gam his gratitude (and failing).

> … all our company…

The second scene of the play introduces a third strand of plot, one that does not involve aristocrats, but laboring men. Indeed, the second scene is laid in the house of one of them, a carpenter.

These laborers have none of the aura of Athenian aristocrat about them; indeed, they are in every respect, even down to their names, comic Englishmen. This sort of thing is true in all of Shakespeare's plays. Of whatever nationality and historical period the main characters are represented as being, the lower classes are always portrayed as Englishmen of Shakespeare's own time.

The leader of the group, the one in whose house they are meeting, looks about and asks, portentously,

> Is all our company here?

—Act I, scene ii, line 1

[In numbering the lines for reference there would be no problem if nothing but verse were involved, as in *Venus and Adonis* and in the first scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Then the identity and numbering of the lines are fixed. Where we encounter prose, as we do now for the first time, the lines depend on the design of type and the width of the columns. The numbering then varies from edition to edition and can alter the number in passages of verse too, if they follow passages of prose in the same scene. In this book, I am using the numbering system given in "The Signet Classic Shakespeare." If the reader is referring to some other edition, he will often have to look a little to either side of the line number, so to speak, but he will not be

far off and his search will not be difficult.]

This leader is Peter Quince, the carpenter, and it is possible in his case and in all the others to see a connection between the name and the occupation. According to a footnote in the Signet Classic Shakespeare edition, "quines" are blocks of wood used for building and therefore characteristic of carpenters.

The other men of the company are:

Nick Bottom the weaver; one of the numerous meanings of "bottom" is a "skein of thread."

Francis Flute, the bellows-mender, which is apt since the sides of a bellows are fluted.

Tom Snout, the tinker, who deals largely with the repair of kettles, which are characterized by a snout (or spout).

Snug the joiner, an occupation which joins pieces of wood, it is to be hoped snugly.

Finally, there is Starveling the tailor, a name which is evidence that there has long been a tradition that tailors are weak, cowardly, effeminate creatures, perhaps because they work so much on women's clothes and because it is so easy to assume that a manly man would not be interested in such an occupation.

"… Pyramus and Thisby"

The six laborers have met in order to arrange the production of a play intended to celebrate the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. Quince announces the name of the play:

> … our play is, "The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby."

—Act I, scene ii, lines ll-i;

The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe is found in Ovid's *Metamorphose:* (see page I-8) and has no known source beyond that.

Pyramus and Thisbe were a youth and maiden of Babylon who lived in adjoining houses and who loved each other but were kept separate by the enmity of their parents. They talked through a chink in the wall that separated the estates and arranged to meet outside the city one night.

Thisbe got there first, but was frightened by a lion and fled, leaving he: veil behind. The lion, who had just killed an ox, snapped

at the veil, leaving it bloody. Pyramus arrived, found the lion's footprints and the blood; veil. Coming to a natural conclusion, he killed himself. When Thisbe re turned, she found Pyramus' dead body and killed herself as well.

There is a strange similarity between this tale and that of *Romeo and Juliet,* a play that was written at just about the time *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was being written. Did Shakespeare's satirical treatment of the Pyramus-Thisbe story get him interested in doing a serious treatment of it Was the serious treatment already written and was he now poking a little good-natured fun at it? We can never tell.

> … play Ercles rarely …

The workmen are among Shakespeare's most delightful creations: nai'v and yet well-meaning. And of them all, the most naive and the best meaning is Bottom. Bottom no sooner hears the name of the play but he says, pompously:

> A very good piece of work,
> I assure you, and a merry.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 14-15

Since the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe was well known to any Elizabethan with the slightest education, and known to be an utterly tragic one DBF signed for reducing softhearted maidens to floods of tears, Bottom's own characterization of it reveals him at once. He is illuminated as the cock sure know-it-all who knows nothing; the fool who thinks himself CIS, and yet who, through the very enormity of his folly, makes himself lovable. The workmen are each assigned a role in the play and Bottom is given the part of Pyramus the hero. Despite Bottom's pretense of knowledge concerning the play, it promptly turns out that he doesn't know what kind of part Pyramus is. He is told that Pyramus is a lover and he is wistful over the possibility of other roles, saying:

> … my chief humor is for a tyrant.
> I could play Ercles rarely, or a part
> to tear a cat in, to make all split.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 29-31

"Ercles" is Bottom's mispronunciation of Hercules (and much of the humor in Shakespeare's plays rests with the mangling of the English language by the uneducated-something sure to raise patronizing chuckles from the better classes in the audience).

Hercules (Heracles) was the greatest of the legendary heroes of the Greeks. He was a child of Jupiter (Zeus) by an illicit amour with a mortal woman. He thus incurred the vengeful enmity of Juno (Hera). As a result of a crime committed during one of his periodic fits of madness, he was condemned to perform twelve labors for an unworthy relative, Eurystheus, King of Argos.

The tale of his labors (which may originally have been inspired by the progress of the sun through the twelve constellations of the zodiac) were elaborated and interlarded before, between, and afterward by so many additions illustrative of his superhuman strength that Hercules became the most storied individual in Greek legend. He remained popular through all succeeding ages.

Since Hercules' forte was sheer brute strength, mingled with madness, he had to be played broadly with a rolling, bass voice, with rage and threats and much flexing of muscles.

The poorer plays of Elizabethan times were notorious for overacting, something beloved of the lower classes. Certainly Hercules could scarcely be portrayed satisfactorily without overacting, and it was just the sort of role a lovable dimwit like Bottom would yearn for and want to portray.

The "part to tear a cat in, to make all split" is probably a reference to Samson, the Israelite analogue of Hercules. At one time, the young Samson encountered a lion. "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand" (Judges 14:6). Samson would clearly have suited Bottom every bit as much as Hercules would have.

The remaining parts are then given out, with the proceedings interrupted at every point by Bottom's yearnings to play each part as it is described, offering to do it in any way that might be desired. It is only when he is told how unimaginably handsome Pyramus is that Bottom recognizes that only he can play the young man and reconciles himself to the task.

They then all agree to rehearse the play secretly in the wood outside Athens so that no outsiders learn their plans and steal their thunder (the same wood ha which Lysander and Hermia have been scheming to meet).

… the moon's sphere

The second act opens in this very wood, but with neither the well-born lovers nor the low-born actors in view. The wood is already occupied and we are now introduced to still another strand of plot, one that involves sheer fantasy, for it concerns fairies (drawn from Celtic legend rather than Greek mythology, but that doesn't bother anybody).

Two spirits meet to open the act. The more grotesque spirit asks the more graceful one (named simply "Fairy") where it is going. The answer is, in part:

> I do wander everywhere,
> Swifter than the moon's sphere;

—Act II, scene i, lines 6-7

Here we have a little Greek astronomy. The Greeks believed that the sun, the moon, and the various planets were each set in a transparent sphere. The various spheres were nested one beyond the other, all centered on the earth, which was the very core and midpoint of the universe.

The spheres moved in various complicated fashions and the end result was to cause the heavenly object attached to it to move against the back-ground of the stars in the fashion observed by human astronomers. The smaller, inner spheres turned more rapidly than the larger, outer ones. The moon was attached to the innermost, smallest sphere and therefore, since that sphere turned most rapidly, it moved against the stars most rapidly. -The Fairy boasts it can move even swifter than the swiftest heavenly body, the moon and its sphere.

The notion that all the spheres turned about the earth as a center was seriously challenged by the Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus in 1543. The issue was strongly disputed and was not finally settled in favor of Copernicus till after Shakespeare's death. Indeed, Copernicus' theory was not inconsistent with spheres (centered about the sun, rather than the earth) and it was not till Kepler showed that the planets moved in elliptical orbits (in 1609) that the notion of the celestial spheres began to die.

Shakespeare does *not,* be it noted, take the advanced position of agreeing with Copernicus. In science he is a thoroughgoing conservative who clings tightly to Greek teachings, and the notion of the spheres is a favorite of his. He refers to them in a number of places.

… the Fairy Queen The Fairy continues to describe her duties:
And I serve the Fairy Queen To dew her orbs upon the green.

-Act II, scene i, lines 8-9

Nowadays we think of fairies (when we think of them at all) as tiny little creatures with butterfly wings, suitable characters for children's tales. Tinkerbell, the fairy in *Peter Pan,* is a prize example.

This is strictly a modern, watered-down version, however; a notion to which, actually, the fairies of this very play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have greatly contributed.

In earlier centuries fairies were taken much more seriously, and well they might be, for they originated in part out of a dim memory of the pagan sprites of the woodlands: the fauns, satyrs, and nymphs of the Greco-Roman mythology, together with the gnomes, elves, and kobolds of the Teutonic imaginings and the sorcerers and "little folk" of Celtic tales. They were the mysterious forces of nature, usually capricious, often malevolent.

The vague old beliefs clung among the country folk and became old wives' tales, while the Church, recognizing their pagan origins, strove against them.

Naturally the fairies would have a king and queen, though their names and powers vary from region to region. (For a mythology to become standard, a sophisticated literature is required, and this could scarcely be found in the case of a set of beliefs driven by the Church into refuge among the rude and unlettered.)

To us, the most familiar name of the Fairy Queen is "Titania," which is the name Shakespeare uses. But it is familiar to us *only* because Shakespeare uses it in this play. As far as we know, he was the first ever to use that name for the Fairy Queen.

We can only speculate what inspired Shakespeare to use it. The most likely guess points to Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* which Shakespeare used so often. At one point Ovid uses the name "Titania" for the moon, referring to Phoebe (see page I-12) by the same line of reasoning that causes one to use "Titan" to refer to the sun (see page I-11).

This, after all, is a moon-drenched play, a tale of fantastic doings in the dim-lit night. It may have pleased Shakespeare to have the Fairy Queen a version of the moon goddess.

The "orbs upon the green" are circles of darker grass that can be found here and there on lawns. These are the result of a mushroom's activities: a mushroom which sends out threads in all directions and fruits now and then in gradually wider circles, or parts of circles.

Those with sufficient imagination see in these circles the existence of tiny ballrooms for fairies (here viewed as miniature creatures). They are called "fairy rings."

> … Oberon is passing fell…

The grotesque spirit, on hearing that the other is part of the train of the Fairy Queen, says:

> The King doth keep his revels here tonight.
> Take heed the Queen come not within his sight,
> For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,

—Act II, scene i, lines 18-20

The name "Oberon" is not a creation of Shakespeare's. Indeed, it dates back to ancient Teutonic times. The old Germanic legends told of a variety of earth spirits. The dwarfs (undersized, deformed creatures, usually malevolent) had, as their chief occupation, mining. (This is still so, even in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.)* We can only wonder whether the legend arose in part out of the first sight by Germanic hunters of miners, caked with soil-with most of them children or undersized adults, since a small body was at a premium for writhing through the underground passages.

In any case, the king of the dwarfs in the Teutonic tales was Alberich, who is best known to us today for the part he plays in the Nibelung tale as told in Richard Wagner's four operas that begin with the Rhinemaidens and end with the Twilight of the Gods. Alberich is the fiendish dwarf who steals the gold from the Rhinemaidens. When the gold is taken from him in turn, he lays a curse upon all future holders of the gold and it is the working out of this curse that finally ends the universe.

"Alberich" is softened into "Oberon" in the French. As king of the fairies, rather than of the dwarfs, he plays a part in a popular medieval romance called *Huon of Bordeaux.* Huon kills the son of Charlemagne in this tale and is sent off on a dangerous quest in punishment. He meets Oberon, who is described as the son of a most curious pair of parents: Julius Caesar of Roman history and Morgan le Fay of Celtic legend. (Yet is that so curious? Medieval French culture represented a mingling of the Celtic peoples of ancient Gaul with the Roman conquerors-together with the later Germanic conquerors, represented by Charlemagne. Huon and Oberon may represent the meeting of Frank with Gallo-Roman.-But never mind, it's Shakespeare

I'm talking about in this book.)

Huon of Bordeaux was translated into English about 1540 by an English statesman and author, John Boucheir, 2d Baron Berners. Shakespeare must surely have been aware of it, and he borrowed "Oberon" from it.

Oberon and Titania are both in the heavens now. The German-English astronomer William Herschel, who had discovered the planet Uranus in 1781, detected its two outermost satellites (it has five altogether, as far as we know today) in 1787. Departing from the then universal habit of naming bodies of the solar system after Greco-Roman gods and goddesses, he resorted to Shakespeare and named them Titania and Oberon. Oberon is the outermost.

… so sweet a changeling

The reason for the quarrel between Titania and Oberon is explained to the audience at once, for the ungainly spirit says that Oberon is angry with Titania:

> Because that she as her attendant hath
> A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
> She never had so sweet a changeling.
> And jealous Oberon would have the child

—Act II, scene i, lines 21-24

It was one of the more fear-provoking legends concerning fairies that it was their habit to steal healthy infants from their cradles, substituting sickly or deformed ones. The substituted infants found by the mothers were "changelings." The true horror of this legend lay not so much in the needless fear it provoked among parents but in the fact that when a deformed, retarded, or sickly child was indeed born, that poor infant was sometimes mistreated in order that the fairies might be induced to take it away again.

In this case, Shakespeare mistakenly refers to the stolen normal child as the changeling.

This speech, by the way, contains one of the numerous indications in the play that the fairies are very small in size, for the spirit says that whenever Oberon and Titania meet, they quarrel vehemently so that:

—all their elves for fear

Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

—Act II, scene i, lines 30-31

The best that can be done on the stage, of course, is to have the fairies played by children, and that is really quite small enough, for in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* children pretend to be fairies (see page I-446) and succeed in fooling one of the characters, who is not portrayed as wondering that fairies are so large. Shakespeare may deliberately have reduced the fairies in this play to minuscule size to add to the fantasy.

Oberon and Titania, at least, give the appearance of being full-sized humans, if we consider what Shakespeare says of them.

… Robin Goodfellow

By this time the Fairy has recognized the spirit to whom it has been speaking. It says:

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow.

—Act II, scene i, lines 32-34

The Fairy recites the mischievous deeds of Robin Goodfellow, but adds:

Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck.

—Act II, scene i, lines 40-41

Puck, a king of the elves in Scottish mythology, was pictured as an evil demon, to begin with. His role diminished with time to that of a mere mischief-maker and it is this role Shakespeare gives him.

To avert the mischief, it was necessary to flatter him, to call him "sweet Puck" or use the euphemism "Goodfellow," with the friendly

given name of "Robin" (of which "Hob" is the diminutive).

The Germans had a kind of earthy, mischievous creature in their legends, who behaved much like Shakespeare's Puck, and who were called "kobolds." "Goblin" may be a form of that word, so that "hobgoblin" means "Robin the Kobold." (People were sufficiently fearful of Puck's knavishness to make "hobgoblin" become synonymous with a besetting fear.)

Puck proudly admits his identity and describes himself as Oberon's jester, making the rather dour Fairy King laugh at the practical jokes the tricksy sprite plays on people.

> … the shape of Corin …

Puck is scarcely finished when Oberon enters from one side and Titania from the other, each with their attendant elves. Both are angry at once and in no time at all are shrewishly raking up past infidelities. Titania says:

> … I know
> When thou hast stolen away from fairy land
> And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
> Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love
> To amorous Phyllida.

—Act II, scene i, lines 64-68

It is not moderns only who long for a simpler past and who imagine a world of country joy and pastoral pleasures. The city folk of Shakespeare's time, and for that matter, those of ancient times, likewise turned away from what they conceived to be the corrupting influence of city life and longed for a magical land of shepherds and milkmaids ("Arcadia") that never really existed.

Pastoral plays and poetry were a fad in Shakespeare's time and one conventional name for the shepherd-hero was Corin. Indeed, Shakespeare makes use of that name for a shepherd in his own pastoral play *As You Like It* (see page I-568). As for Phyllida, that is a version of "Phyllis," a traditional name for a pastoral heroine, and a good one too, since it means "leafy" in Greek.

Titania accuses Oberon, further, of having arrived in Athens from India only to be at Theseus' wedding because he himself has been a past lover of Hippolyta.

Accusations like these make us think of Oberon and Titania as

full-sized. To be sure, they can take any shape they wish (Oberon made love to Phyllida "in the shape of Corin") but it is difficult to think of them being lovingly interested in coarse humans if they themselves are dainty enough to fit in an acorn cup.

… Ariadne and Antiopa

Oberon, furious at Titania's scandalous allegations, accuses her in turn of being in love with Theseus and having caused him to betray earlier loves of whom she had been jealous. Oberon says:

> Didst not thou lead him through the glimmering night
> From Perigenia, whom he ravished?
> And make him with fair
> Aegles break his faith,
> With Ariadne and Antiopa?

-Act II, scene i, lines 77-80

These were women whom Theseus met in the course of his adventures. Thus, Perigenia was the daughter of Sinis, a wicked bandit who lived at the Corinthian Isthmus. Sinis would bend the tops of pine trees to the ground and tie some luckless traveler's right foot to one pine tree, and left-foot to the other. He would then release the trees, which would spring upright, tearing the traveler in two.

Theseus wrestled with him and killed him, then discovered the bandit's daughter hiding in terror. She fell in love with him at once. Theseus had a child by her, but then gave her to one of his companions.

Aegles and Antiopa are two other loves of Theseus. In fact, Antiopa (Antiope) is the name of the Amazonian Queen, for which Shakespeare substituted the name "Hippolyta."

By all odds, the most famous of the forsaken maidens is Ariadne. She was the daughter of King Minos of Crete, who, when Theseus was a youth, held Athens under tribute, demanding seven youths and seven maidens each year. These were sacrificed to the Minotaur, a bull-headed monster. (This is a legendary memory of the time, prior to 1400 b.c., when Crete was the greatest naval power in the Mediterranean, and when bull worship was an important factor in its religion.)

Theseus had himself selected as one of the seven youths and sailed to Crete to place an end to the tribute once and for all.

The Minotaur was hidden in the center of a labyrinth so intricate

that no one entering could expect to find his way out even if he were so fortunate as to kill the monster. (This may well have been a Grecian memory of the great palace at Knossos, the Cretan capital, which had so many rooms that the unsophisticated Greeks of the day must have wondered how anyone could find his way around within it.)

Minos' daughter, Ariadne, having fallen in love with Theseus, gave him a magic ball of twine which would unwind before him, leading him to the Minotaur, and which he could then trace back for the return. Theseus followed the twine, killed the Minotaur, and returned.

The Athenian had promised to make Ariadne his wife in return and when he left Crete, he took her with him. They landed on the Aegean island of Naxos and while she slept, Theseus and his party stole away and made for Athens without her. Why he deserted her the myths don't say, though Mary Renault has a fascinating conjecture concerning it in her novel *The King Must Die.*

... angry winter…

Titania, womanlike, dismisses the charges scornfully as fantasies born of jealousy. She speaks bitterly of their quarreling as having caused the very seasons to have grown confused (a dear reflection of the role of the fairies as nature spirits):

> The spring, the summer,
> The childing autumn, angry winter, change
> Their wonted liveries; and the mazed world,
> By their increase, now knows not which is which.

—Act II, scene i, lines 111-14

The interest here lies in that some critics see this to be a contemporary reference. The years 1594-96 were horrible, from the standpoint of weather, in England, and if the play had been written in 1595, Shakespeare might have been referring to the weather at this time.

Oberon points out that to end the quarreling, all that need be done is for Titania to give up the Indian changeling, but this Titania flatly refuses to do, and they part.

… certain stars shot madly …

The chafed Oberon decides to teach Titania a lesson. He calls Puck to him and reminds him of a time they listened to a mermaid (see page 1-12) sing. Oberon says:

> … the rude sea grew civil at her song,
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
> To hear the sea maid's music.

—Act II, scene i, lines 152-54

This represents the romantic belief that even inanimate nature responds to beautiful music. This is most commonly aired in connection with Orpheus, the musician of Greek legend, and a beautiful song on that subject is to be found in *Henry VIII*.

The Greeks supposed that the stars possessed a sphere of their own. The stars do not move relative to each other (they are "fixed stars" as opposed to the planets) and all were affixed to a single sphere, therefore. Shakespeare, however, mistakenly supposes each star to have its individual sphere and therefore says the stars shot madly from their "spheres."

The thought that a star could leave its sphere arises from the sight of "shooting stars," which are not stars at all, of course, but fragments of matter, often no larger than a pinhead, which in their travels about the sun collide with the earth and are heated to white brilliance by friction with the air.

> … a fair vestal…

Oberon goes on:

> That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took
> At a fair vestal throned by the west,

—Act II, scene i, lines 155-58

But Cupid's arrow, for a wonder, missed:

> And the imperial vot'ress passed on,

In maiden meditation, fancy-free.

—Act II, scene i, lines 163-64

Vesta was the Roman goddess of the hearth; that is, of the household fire. The six priestesses in her service had, as their chief duty, the guarding of a sacred flame which must never be allowed to go out. This is perhaps a memory of a time when the art of lighting a fire at will was new and difficult, and when the loss of a household fire meant an uncomfortable period of cold and uncooked food. (It would be something like a breakdown in electric service these days.)

The priestesses were required to be virgins and to maintain an absolute chastity on pain of torture and death, and it is recorded that in eleven hundred years only twenty cases of violation of that rule were recorded.

The Vestal Virgins were venerated and had many privileges, taking precedence even over the Emperor on certain ceremonial occasions. The term "vestal" has come to be synonymous with "virgin" in the English language because of them.

Shakespeare's reference to the "fair vestal throned by the west" can be to none other than to Elizabeth I who, at the time the play was written had been reigning thirty-seven years, was sixty-two years old, and had never married. Non-marriage need not necessarily be equated with virginity, of course, and Elizabeth had had several favorites (including the Earl of Essex at the time the play was written) but her subjects accepted her virginity as fact.

In the early years of her reign, her failure to marry was of great concern to her advisers, for children were required if the succession was to be made sure. As the years passed and she grew too old to have children anyway, the best had to be made of it, and Elizabeth's reputed virginity became a source of pride. She became known as the "Virgin Queen," and when in the 1580s the first English settlers attempted to found colonies on what is now the east-central shore of the United States, they named the region "Virginia" in her honor.

Shakespeare's delicate picture of Elizabeth as a "fair vestal" whom not even "Cupid all armed" could defeat and who remained "in maiden meditation, fancy-free" must surely have pleased the aged Queen, who had always been terribly vain of her good looks, and who insisted on being treated as a beauty even after she had long ceased to be one. The terrible anachronism of placing her in the reign of Theseus would bother no one.

… a girdle round about the earth

Cupid's arrow, which misses the fair vestal, hits a flower which Oberon describes as:

> Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
> And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

—Act II, scene i, lines 167-68

The flower referred to is more commonly spoken of nowadays as the pansy. Oberon orders Puck to:

> Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again
> Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

—Act II, scene i, lines 173-74

It is foolish, of course, to try to attach literal meaning to what is obviously poetic hyperbole, but-just for fun-"leviathan" is the whale, which can swim as speedily as twenty miles an hour. To swim a league (three miles) would require nine minutes.

Puck answers:

> /'// put a girdle round about the earth
> In forty minutes.

—Act II, scene i, lines 175-76

It is interesting to note that Puck outdoes even the modern astronaut, who requires ninety minutes to go around the earth. To circumnavigate the planet in forty minutes means moving at the rate of 37,500 miles an hour or a little over 10 miles a second. Puck would be hard put to manage to stay close to the earth's surface at this speed, for he would well exceed the escape velocity.

However, Shakespeare was writing a century before Newton had worked out the law of gravity, and, in any case, we can assume that such mundane universal laws of the universe would not apply to Puck.

In the nine minutes allowed him by Oberon, by the way, Puck

could, at this speed, flash to a point twenty-seven hundred miles away and back again. In short, he could fly from Athens to England and back with several minutes to spare, and it must have been in England that Oberon saw Cupid aiming at the fair vestal. -So through all the fantasy, Shakespeare manages (without meaning it, I'm sure) to allow Puck enough time.

Oberon plans to use the juice of the plant he has sent Puck for as a love philter. It will serve to make Titania fall in love with something abhorrent, and thus Oberon will have his revenge.

… you hardhearted adamant

At this point, Demetrius (warned by Helena of the lovers' flight) comes upon the scene in search of Lysander and Hermia, intent on killing the former and dragging the latter back to Athens. Helena tags after him, although Demetrius, utterly ungrateful for her help, does his best to drive her away. But poor Helena cries out:

> You draw me, you hardhearted adamant;
> But yet you draw not iron, for my heart
> Is true as steel.

—Act II , scene i, lines 195-97

The word "adamant" is from a Greek expression meaning "not tamed." It was applied to a mythical substance that was so hard it could not be cut or broken and in that sense could not be tamed. The word has been applied to the hardest naturally occurring substance; that is, to diamond, and, as a matter of fact, "diamond" is a corruption of "adamant."

In the Middle Ages "adamant" was falsely related to the Lathi expression "adamare," meaning "to attract," so that it came to be applied to the magnet. Helena cleverly uses the word in both senses at once, for Deme-trius attracts her as though he were a magnet and his cruel heart is diamond-hard.

Apollo flies …

Demetrius desperately tries to escape her importunities, and Helena, still pursuing him, says sadly:

Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;

—Act II, scene i, line 231

Daphne was a nymph, daughter of the Peneus River (which cuts across Thessaly in northern Greece). Apollo fell in love with her and when she refused him, he tried to rape her. She fled and Apollo ran after. Even as his hands were clutching at her shoulder, she prayed to the earth goddess, who changed her into a laurel tree.

To Helena, it seems that the old myth reverses itself in her case. Oberon, overhearing, pities her. He decides to use the love juice for Demetrius as well as for Titania. In this way do the fairy plot and the lovers plot intertwine.

Oberon does not count, however, on a second pair of Athenians creeping through the fairy-haunted wood. Lysander and Hermia, coming on stage, are overcome by weariness and lie down to sleep. Puck, returning with the love juice, is told by Oberon to anoint the eyes of an Athenian youth in the woods. Puck finds Lysander and Hermia sleeping, assumes Lysander is the youth meant by Oberon, and places the juice on his eyes.

Next comes Demetrius running through, outdistancing the panting Helena. Helena, who can run no more, finds Hermia and Lysander sleeping, wonders if they are dead, and wakes Lysander. He sees Helena through his juice-moistened eyes and falls madly in love with her immediately.

Helena assumes she is being mocked and runs away. Lysander pursues her and Hermia wakes to find herself alone.

... a bush of thorns. ..

Meanwhile, in that spot of the woods where Titania lies sleeping (hav-ng earlier been lulled to sleep by a fairy-sung lullaby), the Athenian laborers come blundering in to work out the production problems of *Pyramus and Thisbe.*

Those problems are many and difficult to their unsophisticated minds. Bottom points out, for instance, that when Pyramus draws a sword to kill himself, he will frighten the ladies in the audience. What's more, introduc-ing a lion will frighten them even more. It will be necessary, Bottom ex-plains, to have a prologue written that will explain that no harm is intended, hat the lion is not a real one, and so on.

There is next the question of moonlight. Will there be a moon that night? Quince checks the almanac and says:

Yes, it doth shine that night.

—Act III, scene i, line 55

This is odd, since the play is to be given at Theseus' wedding and Theseus himself has said it will take place on the night of the new moon, which means there will be *no* moon in the sky.

But it really doesn't matter. Even if there is no moon to shine naturally upon the stage, Quince has an alternative.

> … one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lantern,
> and say he comes to disfigure,
> or to present, the person of Moonshine.

—Act III, scene i, lines 59-61

A man holding a lantern on high is an obvious representation of the moon. But why a bush of thorns?

The vague shadows on the moon's face, visible to the naked eye, are the marks of the "seas," relatively flat circular areas surrounded by the lighter cratered and mountainous areas. In the days before telescopes, the nature of the markings could not be known and an imaginative peasantry concerted the shadows into figures; most commonly the figure of a man. This was the "man in the moon."

Somehow the feeling arose that the man in the moon had been hurled there as a punishment and the particular crime was thought to have been described in the Bible. The crime took place when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron" (Numbers 15:32-33).

It is clearly stated that this sabbath breaker was stoned to death. Nevertheless, an alternate non-biblical version of his punishment arose and grew popular. This was that for breaking the sabbath he was exiled to the moon with the sticks he had gathered. The sticks gradually elaborated into a thornbush and a dog was often added too (either as a merciful gesture of company for the man or as an unmerciful representation of the devil, who forever torments him). When in the final act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the little play is actually put on at Theseus' wedding, the dog appears with Starveling the Tailor, who plays Moonshine.

… at Ninny's tomb

Puck enters, having taken care (as he supposes) of Demetrius, and now all ready to place the love juice on Titania's eyes. He finds, to his amazement, the rehearsal in progress. Bottom (as Pyramus) delivers his lines and exits, while Flute (as Thisbe) calls after him:

I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

—Act III, scene i, line 98

"Ninny's tomb" is Flute's mangling of "Ninus' tomb." Ninus, according to Greek legend, was the founder of the Assyrian Empire and the builder of Nineveh, its capital, which, as was thought, was named after him. Since the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe takes place in Babylon, which was an important part of the Assyrian Empire, a mention of Ninus' tomb is useful local color.

The Greek versions of Assyrian history are, of course, completely distorted. There was no historical character such as Ninus. There was, however, an early Assyrian conqueror, Tukulti-Ninurta I, who reigned about the time of the Trojan War. His fame may have dimly reached across Asia Minor, and his long name could have been shortened to the first half of the second part, with a final *s* (which ended almost all Greek names) added.

… make an ass of me …

The mischievous Puck sees his chance to improve on the instructions given him by Oberon. He follows Pyramus offstage and works a charm that places an ass's head on his shoulders. When Bottom returns, unaware of the change, he finds that his frightened companions take one look at him and flee. Their cries to the effect that he is monstrously changed leave him puzzled. Finally, he says:

/ see their knavery.
This is to make an ass of me; to fright me, if they could.

—Act III, scene i, lines 121-22

Bottom, who, figuratively speaking, has proved himself all through the play to have an ass's head, now owns one literally; and he is as unaware of his literal ass's head now as he had been of his figurative one earlier.

But he remains lovable in his folly even now. Titania, who has had the juice placed on her eyes, wakes at this moment and at once falls in love with Bottom in his grotesque disguise. She places her retinue of tiny fairies at his disposal, and Bottom, taking it all as his due, allows himself, most complacently, to be worshiped and adored.

… *the gun's report* Delighted, Puck races to report the event to Oberon. He describes the scene when Bottom returns with his ass's head and the other workmen scatter and fly:

> As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye,
> Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,
> Rising and cawing at the gun's report,

—Act III, scene ii, lines 20-22

Either Puck can foresee the future with remarkable clarity or this is a particularly amusing anachronism-guns in the time of Theseus.

> … th'Antipodes

Oberon is pleased, but asks about the Athenian lovers, and Puck says he has taken care of that too.

But in comes Demetrius. He has found Hermia, who is berating him bitterly for having killed Lysander. Only Lysander's death could explain his having left her while asleep. She would not for one moment accept the possibility that he had crept away from her willingly:

> /'// believe as soon
> This whole earth may be bored, and that the moon
> May through the center creep, and so displease
> Her brother's noontide with th'Antipodes.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 52-55

The ancient Greeks were the first to realize that the earth was spherical in shape. (To be sure, they were not the Greeks of Theseus' time. The first who thought so lived seven and a half centuries after Theseus.) They realized that people who lived on the other side of the globe from themselves would have their feet pointing upward, so to speak, in the direction opposite from that in which their" own feet pointed.

The people on the other side of the globe would therefore be "antipodes" ("opposite-feet"). The name was applied to the other side of the globe itself as a result.

… the Tartar's bow

Demetrius desperately denies having killed Lysander, but Hermia scolds him fiercely and leaves. Demetrius, wearied, lies down to sleep. Oberon, seeing Puck's mistake, sends him angrily after Helena so that the mistake can be corrected. Puck, eager to calm his angry king, says:

/ go, I go; look how 1 go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 100-1

Europe, through its ancient and medieval history, has been periodically plagued by nomadic horsemen thundering west from the steppes of central Asia. The Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Huns, Avars, and Magyars each in turn terrorized European territories. The nomads won their victories through superior mobility; through the dash of their swift and hardy horses, from whose backs the riders shot arrows that galled their slower-moving European adversaries.

The last and most terrible of the nomadic invaders were the Tatars or Mongols, who in the first half of the thirteenth century conquered both China and Russia. In 1240 the speeding Mongol horsemen darted into central Europe, smashing every clumsy army of armored knights that was raised to stop them, and spreading ruin and desolation almost to the Adriatic.

Far back in central Asia their ruler died and all the Mongol armies (undefeated) swept back to take part in the decision as to the succession. In 1241, therefore, the Mongols left and, as it happened, never returned.

The Europeans, however, were long to remember the dreadful period of 1240-41. They called the horsemen Tartars, rather than Tatars, thinking of them not as men but as demons from Tartarus (see page 1-13). The Tartars' arrows remained in mind and Shakespeare could use them as a metaphor for speed (even though they had entered European consciousness twenty-five centuries after the time of Theseus).

… high Taurus' snow

Oberon places the juice on Demetrius' eyes and Puck brings back Helena as ordered. With Helena, however, is Lysander, still under the influence of the juice and still pleading love. Helena persists in thinking Lysander is making cruel fun of her. The noise they make wakes Demetrius, who is now also in love with Helena.

Demetrius addresses her in the most elaborate lover's fashion, saying:

That pure congealed white, high Taurus' snow,
Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow
When thou hold'st up thy hand:
O, let me kiss This princess of pure white…

—Act III, scene ii, lines 141-44

Helena is obviously a fair-skinned blonde, which in medieval times rep resented an ideal of beauty. Her skin is whiter than the snows of the Taurus Mountains, a range in southeastern Asia Minor.

When the German tribes tore the western provinces of the Roman Empire apart, they established themselves as an aristocracy over a Celto-Roman peasantry. The Germans were taller than the Celto-Romans on the average, and faker. Over the centuries, therefore, fair skin, blond hah-, blue eyes, and tall stature came to be associated with aristocracy and beauty; the reverse with peasanthood and ugliness.

Helena, completely confused, decides that both men have combined for some insane reason to make fun of her. Then, when Hermia enters and acts astonished, Helena maintains that her old girlfriend has also joined in the joke.

… you Ethiope

Poor Hermia can make nothing of what is going on. All she knows is that she has found Lysander again, but that Lysander is acting most peculiarly. She approaches Lysander timidly to find out what it is all about, but the erstwhile tender lover turns on the poor girl savagely and says:

> Away, you Ethiope!

—Act III, scene ii, line 257

The expression "Ethiopian" is from Greek words meaning "burnt faces"-faces that have been darkened by exposure to the sun. It was applied to the races living south of Egypt and was eventually used for African blacks generally.

Here, then, the same principle that brings about praise for Helena's fair beauty brings contempt for poor Hermia's darker complexion.

Hermia has trouble understanding this, but when she does she leaps at once to the conclusion that Helena has stolen her love. She cries out furiously about Helena:

> Now I perceive that she hath made compare
> Between our statures; she hath urged her height,
> And with her personage, her tall personage,
> Her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with hint.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 290-93

She advances upon Helena, nails unsheathed, and Helena fearfully shrinks away as both men vie in protecting her.

The exasperated Hermia accepts every remark as a reference to her plebeian shortness and Lysander, sensing her sensitivity, throws the fact of it in her face, saying:

> Get you gone, you dwarf;
> You minimus, of hind'ring knotgrass made;
> You bead, you acorn!

—Act III, scene ii, lines 328-30

Knotgrass, a common weed, was supposed to stunt growth if eaten.

Lysander and Demetrius, angered with each other over their common love for Helena, as earlier they had been over their common love for Hermia, stride offstage to fight. At this, Helena, left alone with Hermia, flees, and Hermia follows.

… as black as Acheron

Oberon is terribly irritated and virtually accuses Puck of having done all this deliberately. Puck denies having done it on purpose, though he admits the results have turned out fun.

Oberon orders him to begin mending matters:

… Robin, overcast the night.
The starry welkin cover thou anon
With drooping fog, as black as Acheron;
And lead these testy rivals so astray,
As one comes not within another's way.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 355-59

Acheron is the name of one of the five rivers which the classical writers described as encircling the underworld. For some reason, the name of this particular river came to be applied to the underworld generally, so that "Acheron" came to be a synonym for "Hades."

Once the night is made dark, Puck is to mislead Lysander and Demetrius, weary them to sleep once more, rearrange their affections, entice them into considering it all a dream, and send all four safely back to Athens.

… Aurora's harbinger

Puck agrees, but urges haste:

For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger;

—Act HI, scene ii, lines 379-80

Aurora (known to the Greeks as Eos) is the goddess of the dawn. She is the third child of the Titan Hyperion (see page I-ll), a sister of Helios, god of the sun, and Selene, goddess of the moon.

Her harbinger is the planet Venus, shining as the morning star and rising only an hour or two before the sun and therefore not long before the dawn.

Oberon agrees and Puck accomplishes the task, sending all four Athenians into a scrambling confusion that wearies them to sleep once more. He then anoints Lysander's eyes in such a way that when all four awake, all shall be straightened out. Or, as Puck says:

> Jack shall have Jill;
> Nought shall go ill;
> The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 461-63

"Jack and Jill" is a stock phrase for a man and his sweetheart or wife. Jack is clearly a generic name for a man generally, since it is so common (a diminutive of Jacob, which in one form or another-James in England, Hamish in Scotland, Jacques in France, lago or Diego in Spam and Portugal, and Giacopo in Italy-was an extremely popular name all over western Europe).

Jill is far less common and is usually considered a short version of Juliana. It was used, probably, because a one-syllabled girl's name starting with the J sound was needed, though it seems to me that Joan would have been more fitting. In any case, we ourselves know Jack and Jill primarily from the nursery rhyme that sends them to the top of a hill to fetch a pail of water.

Nor is this the only complication unraveled. Oberon meets Titania, who, in her entranced adoration of the ass-headed Bottom, freely gives up her Indian boy. She then has Bottom sleep with his long-eared head in her lap, and Oberon finally takes pity on her. He releases her from her spell and orders Puck to remove the ass's head from Bottom and send him back to Athens too.

And so at last are Oberon and Titania reconciled.

> … with Hercules and Cadmus…

Now that the complications of the subplots are solved, Theseus and Hippolyta come on the scene again. They are following the hunt

and Hippolyta says, in reminiscence:

> / was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
> When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear
> With hounds of Sparta.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 115-17

The world of orthodox Greek myth comes swimming back. Hercules was indeed a contemporary of Theseus and the two are made companions in several myths.

Cadmus, in the legends, was a Phoenician prince. He had come to Greece in search of Europa, his sister. She had been kidnapped by Zeus in the shape of a bull and brought to Crete, where Minos was to reign and the Minotaur was to be found. As a matter of fact, Minos was the son of Europa.

Cadmus never found Europa (so that it isn't quite right to place him in Crete). Wandering in Greece itself, he founded the city of Thebes. The Greek legend has it that it was Cadmus who taught the letters of the alphabet to the Greeks. This is interesting since the alphabet did, in actual fact, originate with the Phoenicians and it is entirely appropriate that the Greeks be taught it by Cadmus, a Phoenician prince.

Sparta is mentioned in this passage too. In Theseus' time it was a city in southern Greece that was not particularly remarkable, though it was soon to become the home of Helen, whose beauty sparked the Trojan War. In later centuries Sparta was to become the most militarized and, for a time, the most militarily successful of the Greek cities.

> … Thessalian bulls

Theseus says that his own hounds are of the same breed as the "hounds of Sparta" Hippolyta has mentioned:

> … their heads are hung
> With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
> Crook-kneed, and dew-lapped like Thessalian bulls;

—Act IV, scene i, lines 123-25

Thessaly is a fertile plain region in northeastern Greece, much different from the rocky, mountainous area to the south where Greece's most famous cities, including Athens, Sparta, Thebes, and Corinth, were located. It would be naturally a place where horses would be useful and where cattle would be profitably bred. A Thessalian bull would be larger and better than a bull bred elsewhere in Greece.

The rite of May

In the wood, the hunting party, which includes Egeus, the father of Hermia, comes upon the four young people, still sleeping where Puck had left them.

Egeus frowns and begins to ponder on the meaning, but Theseus, depicted throughout the play as courtly and kind, quickly places a harmless interpretation on the matter. He says:

> No doubt they rose up early to observe
> The rite of May;

—Act IV, scene i, lines 135-36

May Day, the first of May, was a day of nature celebration in ancient times. Spring was definitely established by then; the greenery was growing; it was warm enough to spend the evening outdoors. It was a time for revelry and youth, and no doubt a time when the fertility of nature might best be imitated by the celebrants.

The Maypole about which the young people danced may well be what was left of a phallic symbol. Indeed, earlier in the play, Hermia had made use of just such an implication, perhaps. When she was terribly irritated at being scorned for her shortness, she turned on Helena and said,

> How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak!

—Act III, scene ii, line 296

Not only does Hermia in this way refer disparagingly to Helena as tall and skinny (and perhaps with as little figure as a maypole), but

she also implies that the men, Lysander and Demetrius, are dancing about her with immoral intent.

Theseus' reference places the play well before Midsummer Day, by the way.

> … Saint Valentine …

Perhaps Theseus is not unaware of the coarser ways of celebrating May Day, for as the hunting horns sound and the Athenian lovers rouse themselves, Theseus says, with light mockery:

> Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine is past:
> Begin these wood birds but to couple now?

—Act IV, scene i, lines 142-43

St. Valentine's Day is certainly past, for, as we all know, it falls on February 14. Valentine's Day commemorates the martyred death of St. Valentine on February 14, 270 (which makes it a terribly anachronistic comment in the mouth of Theseus)., The romantic symbolism of the day antedated the good saint. There is a folk belief that the birds began to mate on this day (which is what Theseus is referring to) and this may have initiated fertility rites in pagan days. The Church would attempt to transfer the rites to a Christian commemoration and soften them too, and the story arose that St. Valentine made anonymous gifts of money to help poor girls to a dowry that would find them husbands. Thus, he became the patron saint of romantic love.

The ferocious Egeus, hearing Lysander confess he had intended to elope with Hermia, calls for his death and the marriage of Hermia to Demetrius. Demetrius, however, confesses that he now loves Helena. Theseus, listening politely, decides that each loving pair is now to be married, Lysander to Hermia, and Demetrius to Helena.

Meanwhile Bottom also rouses himself, finds his natural head restored, dismisses his vague memories as a dream, and returns to Athens and to his mourning comrades. They are delighted to meet him and continue to prepare their play.

> "The battle with the Centaurs…"

The time of the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta is now at

hand. Theseus has heard of the events of the magic night in the woods and dismisses them as fantasy. He turns to the list of entertainments proposed for the wedding feast and reads off the first item:

> "The battle with the Centaurs, to be sung
> By an Athenian eunuch to the harp."
> We'll none of that. That have I told my love,
> In glory of my kinsman Hercules.

—Act V, scene i, lines 44-47

Centaurs were common monsters of Greek myths, composite creatures with the head and torso of men affixed to the body of a horse. They were supposed to have been natives of Thessaly. Perhaps the notion originated with the first sight of men riding horses. The southern Greeks, in their narrow valleys, having been unused to horses for generations, would find men on horseback in the plains of Thessaly when they marched northward in battle and tales of centaurs would drift back to stay-at-homes.

The centaurs were considered to be barbaric creatures of the senses, given to gross eating, to drunkenness and lechery. The chief tale in which centaurs are prominent involves the marriage of Pirithous, a friend of Theseus (he does not appear in this play but he has a minor role in *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* see page I-56).

Pirithous, who was of the Thessalian tribe of the Lapiths, invited his kinsmen and friends to the wedding, Theseus among them. He also invited a party of centaurs. The centaurs, however, drank too much and, in a drunken fury, created a disturbance and tried to carry off the bride. At once a fight broke out and the Lapiths, with Theseus' stanch help, drove off the centaurs, killing many.

It could not be this tale that was to be sung by the eunuch, for Hercules is not involved and Theseus refers to a battle with centaurs that redounded to Hercules' honor. But then, Hercules had several encounters with centaurs and won every battle.

Theseus here and in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (see page I-58) refers to "my kinsman Hercules." They were both great-grandchildren, through their mothers, of Tantalus (see page I-13).

> … the tipsy Bacchanals

A second item on the list is:

"The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals,
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage."

—Act V, scene i, lines 48-49

The Thracian singer was Orpheus, who played the lyre and sang so beautifully that wild beasts were calmed and the very trees and rocks left their place to follow him. He married Eurydice, whom he deeply loved, and when she was bitten by a snake and died, he descended into the underworld to reclaim her. So beautiful was his music that he even touched the cold heart of Hades, who agreed to let him take Eurydice back, provided he didn't turn to look at her till he was out of the underworld.

They were almost out, the light of day was ahead, when Orpheus, suddenly fearful that he was being tricked by a counterfeit, turned to look and Eurydice slipped forever away from him.

He emerged to wander about inconsolably. He met a group of bacchanals, women engaged in the wild and drunken rites that celebrated Bacchus, god of the vine. When Orpheus seemed oblivious to them, they interpreted his sad silence as scorn. They tore him apart and threw his head into the river. It floated down to the sea, still singing as it went.

… / from Thebes.. .

Theseus gives his opinion of the Orpheus item curtly:

That is an old device; and it was played
When 1 from Thebes came last a conqueror.

—Act V, scene i, lines 50-51

The myths do contain accounts of a victorious war fought against Thebes by Theseus. As a matter of fact, that war plays an important part in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (see page I-59) where it is fought immediately before the wedding.

"The thrice three Muses …"

A third item is:

> "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death
> Of Learning, late deceased in beggary."

—Act V, scene i, lines 52-53

Theseus dismisses that as a satire too sharp to fit a wedding ceremony.

The nine Muses ("thrice three") were daughters of Jupiter (Zeus) who were the goddesses of the various branches of learning.

Some critics have tried to pick out some particular person meant by "Learning" in this passage. It is suggested, for instance, that the reference is to the death of the Italian poet Torquato Tasso, who died in 1595.

However, it seems most likely that Shakespeare is merely poking fun at the chronic complaints in his time (and in ours, for that matter) that everything is going to the devil, that the great feats of the past will never be equaled, and that the public taste is degenerating. To show that this was felt even in Theseus' time would be amusing.

But then Theseus' eye catches the notice of the play about Pyramus and Thisbe, and though the master of the revels snobbishly dismisses it as the pathetic attempt of ignorant workers and Hippolyta expresses her nervousness over their possible failure, Theseus nobly indicates he will hear it and that nothing can be a failure if it is presented with honest good will and out of a sense of duty.

> … like Limander …

Now Bottom and company present their play, which, in the actual practice, turns out to be lamer and more ridiculous than even the rehearsals had prepared us for. They mangle classical references, as when Bottom (Pyramus) says:

> And, like Limander, am I trusty still.

—Act V, scene i, line 197

Flute (Thisbe) replies to this:

And I like Helen, till the Fates me kill.

—Act V, scene i, line 198

There is no "Limander" anywhere in the corpus of Greek legends. If Flute really means "Helen," that must be the famous Helen of Troy, that paragon of beauty who was the cause of the Trojan War (see page I-76). In that case, Limander must mean Alexander, which is one of the alternate names for Paris, who eloped with her.

On the other hand, it is more likely that by Limander, Bottom meant Leander, the well-known hero of the romantic tale of a lover who nightly swam the Hellespont to be with his love and who, one stormy night, drowned in the attempt. In that case the girl would be Hero, not Helen.

… Shafalus to Procrus.. .

Bottom (Pyramus) also protests:

Not Shafalus to Procrus was so true,

—Act V, scene i, line 199

This is a mangling of Cephalus and Procris, a rather affecting myth about a loving husband and wife. Cephalus, an ardent hunter, had a spear that never missed. He went out hunting early every morning and finally Procris decided to follow him to see if he might not be meeting another woman. Cephalus, heated with hunting, rested and called on the breeze to cool him. Procris, imagining he was calling a woman, sprang from her hiding place and Cephalus, in reflex action, threw his never-missing spear and killed her.

O Sisters Three

The Play of Pyramus and Thisbe ends with a pair of the most terrific death scenes ever seen as first Pyramus and then Thisbe commit elaborate suicide. Thisbe cries out in her turn:

O Sisters Three,
Come, come to me,
With hands as pale as milk;
Lay them in gore,
Since you have shore
With shears his thread of silk.

—Act V, scene i, lines 338-43

The "Sisters Three" are the Fates, who govern all events and whose edicts neither gods nor men can defy. There are three of them by the natural division of time into past, present, and future.

Clotho represents the past and she spins the thread of life, causing life to originate and an individual to be born. Lachesis guides the thread, representing the present and its events. Dreadful Atropos is the future, for she carries the shears with which she snips the thread and brings death.

The three Fates play a much more serious part in *Macbeth* (see page I-160).

… the triple Hecate's team

The play within a play ends with a dance and with its audience amused and ready for bed.

Nothing remains but the final bit of entertainment, supplied by the fairy band. Puck comes on the stage alone to say that with the coming of night once more the fairies are back:

… we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic.

—Act V, scene i, lines 385-89

Hecate was supposed to be one of the Titanesses in Greek mythology, but in the struggle that resulted in their supplanting by Jupiter (Zeus) and the other later gods, Hecate sided with Jupiter and remained in power. She was probably another personification of the

moon.

There were three common goddesses of the moon in the later myths: Phoebe, Diana (Artemis), and Hecate. All three might be combined as the "triple Hecate" and Hecate was therefore frequently portrayed with three faces and six arms.

Later mythologists also tried to rationalize the difference in names by saying that Phoebe was the moon goddess in the heavens, Diana on earth, and Hecate in the underworld.

This connection with the underworld tended to debase her and make her a goddess of enchantments and magic spells, so that the fairies in following "triple Hecate's team" were following not only the pale team of horses that guided the moon's chariot (hence were active at night rather than by day) but also shared her power of enchantment and magic.

Her enchantments and magic made her sink further in Christian times until Hecate finally became a kind of queen of witches, and she appears in this guise in *Macbeth* (see page II-185).

Now in come Oberon and Titania with the rest of their fairies. They make their concluding pretty speeches, placing a good luck charm on all the couples being married in the play (and perhaps on the couple being married in the audience, if *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed to celebrate a marriage). Puck then delivers the epilogue and the play is over.

Nothing in the play indicates a tragic end to the love tale of Theseus and Hippolyta, and though it seems a shame to mention it after such a happy time, I will.

The Amazons, offended at Theseus' kidnapping of their queen, mounted an attack against him. They were defeated, but Hippolyta, fighting Amazonlike at the side of her husband, and against her own subjects of the past, was killed.

3. The Two Noble Kinsmen

In 1613, at the very end of his career, Shakespeare collaborated with John Fletcher in writing two plays.

Fletcher was fifteen years Shakespeare's junior and between 1606 and 1625 (he died in the latter year) he wrote, alone or in collaboration, some fifty plays. The most notable of these were with Francis Beaumont, so that "Beaumont and Fletcher" is almost a single word in the history of English literature.

The Shakespeare-Fletcher collaborations have all but vanished, as such. One of them, *Henry VIII* is generally included in editions of Shakespeare's collected works and is presented as solely by him, with no mention of Fletcher. The other collaboration, *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* is treated quite the reverse. It is generally omitted from Shakespeare's collected works.

Recent scholarship, however, seems to make it reasonably certain that Shakespeare wrote a major part of it, and it is included as one of the volumes of the Signet Classic Shakespeare. The authorship is given as by "William Shakespeare and John Fletcher."

> Chaucer, of all admired…

The play begins with a Prologue (probably written by Fletcher) which gives the source of the content of the drama. Shakespeare had done this once before in connection with *Pericles* (see page I-181), written some five years earlier.

One cannot help wondering if this sort of thing isn't a sign of a certain insecurity on the part of the playwright. Uncertain as to the worth of the play, does he call on the name of a revered ancient as a shield against criticism?

Thus, the Prologue, hoping (rather timorously) that the play meets approval, says:

> It has a noble breeder, and a pure,
> A learned, and a poet never went
> More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent.
> Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives:

—Prolog, lines 10-13

Geoffrey Chaucer was born about 1340 and died in 1400. He was at the peak of his fame during the reign of Richard II (see *Richard II)*. His wife was a lady in waiting to the second wife of John of Gaunt, an uncle of Richard II and an important character in the play of that name. What's more, she was sister to John of Gaunt's third wife.

Chaucer is widely considered the first great writer in English (as opposed to the older Anglo-Saxon or Norman-French languages) and as the father of English literature. Placing him among the most prominent poets of western Europe (between the Po River in northern Italy and the Trent River in central England) is not an undue exaggeration.

Chaucer's masterpiece is the *Canterbury Tales,* published in the last decade of his life. This pictured a group of twenty-nine varied individuals, united in the accident that all were on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. They planned to amuse themselves on the way by each telling (according to the original plan) two stories, making fifty-eight in all. Only twenty-three stories actually appear, so that less than half the original plan was carried through, but what exists is still splendid because of the wide variety in content and style and because of the interesting characterization of each pilgrim, both in description and in the story he or she chooses to tell.

One of the pilgrims was a knight, and his tale was the first to be told. This "Knight's Tale," which serves as the source of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is itself taken from the poem *La Teseida* of Giovanni Boccaccio.

It is a tale of courtly love, treating with seriousness that artificial game of man and woman popularized by the troubadours of southern France in the time of the Crusades. By the conventions of courtly love, a woman was treated in a semifeudal, semireligious manner, with the lover serving her as both a vassal and a worshiper. The lover had to fulfill every whim of his mistress and suffer the extremes of emotion in a manner that had little if any relation to real life, but has affected storybook romance down to our own day. Such love could not exist in marriage but, according to convention, had to face insuperable barriers, such as the marriage of the mistress to someone else. Courtly love was mock passion, mock heroics, mock poetry, with nothing real but the noise it made.

Near the beginning of his career as a playwright, Shakespeare satirized courtly love rather amusingly in his *Love's Labor's Lost* (see page I-437). (It was far more effectively blasted in the great Spanish novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes, the first part of which appeared in 1605. The love of Don Quixote for Dulcinea del Toboso reduced the conventions of courtly love to ridicule once and for all.)

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* Shakespeare and Fletcher treat courtly love seriously, but so lost are its conventions to us of the twentieth century that we cannot-even when Shakespeare asks us to. And at that, perhaps Shakespeare didn't try very hard to win us over. Those portions of the play which he wrote seem to have been pageantlike in nature. Shakespeare was writing "spectacle."

Than Robin Hood

The pageantry and spectacle of the play may even have been forced upon it by the pressure of having to live up to its Chaucerian source (like a modern trying to make a musical out of a Shakespearean play). At least, Fletcher, in the Prologue, begs the audience not to hiss lest Chaucer turn in his grave and say:

> "O fan
> From me the witless chaff of such a writer
> That blasts my bays and my famed works makes lighter
> Than Robin Hood!"

—Prolog, lines 18-21

That great folk hero, Robin Hood, was known to the English public through a series of popular ballads which first appear (as far as modern knowledge is concerned) in Chaucer's lifetime. These ballads were enormously popular but as serious poetry were quite insignificant. They were analogous, in a way, to our own enormously popular but literarily insignificant TV westerns.

> … child of Ver

The play opens with a scene which is thought to be Shakespearean.

Hymen enters. He is the Greek god of marriage, and is a mere personification concerning whom there are no well-known myths. Following Hymen are a variety of nymphs and then a wedding party-a groom, a bride, the groom's friend, the bride's sister. Everything is joyous and springlike and the first words of the play are a song about early flowers:

> Primrose, first-born child of Ver,
> Merry spring-time's harbinger,

—Act I, scene i, lines 7-8

"Ver" is an obsolete term for spring, from the French *vert* (meaning "green"-from which such words as "verdure" and "verdant" are also derived).

The marriage that is being so celebrated is between none other than Theseus and Hippolyta, the same couple who were being married at the start of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see page I-18). In fact, some critics suggest that Shakespeare used Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" as the original inspiration of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* borrowing the marriage as the frame and then filling it with his own subplots. Here in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* he follows Chaucer in the subplot as well.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen,* Theseus is supplied with a friend, Pirithous, who was lacking in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Pirithous is an authentic mythological character. It was at his marriage that a famous battle with centaurs took place (see page I-46).

The best-known myth concerning Theseus and Pirithous deals with an occasion when the latter decided to gain for himself the hand of none other than Proserpina, queen of the underworld (see page I-15). Theseus loyally offered to help and the two invaded Hades. There both were magically imprisoned in chairs from which they could not rise, and it seemed, in punishment for their presumption, that this situation would last eternally. Hercules, however, eventually rescued them. According to some versions, he rescued only Theseus and left Pirithous forever imprisoned in Hades.

Hippolyta in this play is given a sister whom she did not have in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* This is Emilia, a character who does not belong to classical myth at all, but to medieval fiction. She is to be the heroine of this play, the puppet about whom will circle the mummery of courtly love.

… cruel Creon …

Before the marriage can take place, however, three queens enter. Each kneels, pleading, before a separate member of the wedding party, and a stately back-and-forth begins. The First Queen (given no other name in the play) falls at the feet of Theseus, and says:

> We are three queens, whose sovereigns fell before
> The wrath of cruel Creon; who endured
> The beaks of ravens, talons of the kites,
> And pecks of crows, in the foul fields of Thebes.
> He will not suffer us to burn their bones,

To urn their ashes …

—Act I, scene i, lines 39-44

It was in Thebes that the famous legend of Oedipus was set. Oedipus, who had been cast away as an infant and had been brought up far away from Thebes, did not know he was the son of the Theban King and Queen. Visiting Thebes, he unknowingly killed the King and married the Queen-killing his father and marrying his mother, whence we get the expression "Oedipus complex." By his own mother Oedipus had two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, and two daughters, Ismene and Antigone.

After the truth of the matter came out, Oedipus blinded himself and went into voluntary exile, while his mother-wife, Jocasta, committed suicide.

Jocasta's younger brother, Creon, became effective ruler of Thebes. Creon supported Eteocles, Oedipus' elder son, for the succession. Polyneices, the younger son, went into exile and talked certain leaders of the city of Argos, sixty miles southwest of Thebes, into leading an army against his city.

Five Argjve leaders took up the struggle. With them was not only Polyneices, but also Tydeus, who was a refugee in Argos because he had fled his home town after accidentally killing his brother. Tydeus was the father of Diomedes, who was to be an important Greek warrior at the siege of Troy and an important character in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (see page I-79).

The tale of the expedition of these leaders against Thebes is usually called "The Seven Against Thebes," though in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* the number is reduced to three.

The seven were defeated, and Creon remained master of the field. As a punishment for the aggressors (and particularly for Polyneices, who had warred against his own city-an act of treason for which no personal wrongs were deemed sufficient excuse), Creon ordered the fallen warriors on the Argive side to remain in the field unburied, a prey to carrion birds and beasts.

This was a terrible fate for Greeks, who felt that until a dead body had been burned with appropriate rites, its shade must wander restlessly about the border of Hades. In fact, it was held impious of Creon to dictate such a fate, since it was wrong to inflict it even on hated enemies.

The Greek playwright Sophocles wrote one of the greatest of the surviving Greek dramas on this subject. Entitled *Antigone,* it dealt with

Oedipus' younger daughter, who felt that the religious obligation to bury her fallen brother, Polyneices, transcended all other considerations. She accomplishes the deed even though it means her own death.

The three queens apparently have attempted to do Antigone's deed but have failed, and now they have come to ask Theseus to invade Thebes, punish Creon, and see to it that the fallen warriors are duly burned.

> King Capaneus. ..

Theseus is sympathetic to the appeal, for he has met the First Queen before. He says:

> King Capaneus was your lord. The day
> That he should marry you, at such a season
> As now it is with me, I met your groom.

—Act I, scene i, lines 59-61

Capaneus was one of the seven against Thebes and his death was dramatic. He had placed a ladder against Thebes's wall and, climbing it, boasted that not even Jupiter (Zeus) could keep him out of the city now. Promptly, he was struck by a lightning bolt and killed. He had a son, named Sthenelus, who was to be at the siege of Troy as companion and friend of Diomedes. Sthenelus appears in the *Iliad* but not in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida.*

Capaneus' wife was named Evadne, and presumably it is she who is the First Queen.

> … his Nemean hide

On the occasion of the marriage of Capaneus and Evadne, Theseus met the bride as well and found her beautiful. Nor was he the only one. Theseus says:

> Hercules our kinsman, Then weaker than your eyes, laid by his club:
> He tumbled down upon his Nemean hide
> And swore his sinews thawed.

—Act I, scene i, lines 66-69

The reference is to the first labor (see page I-24) of Hercules. That was to kill a lion that infested the valley of Nemea, ten miles southwest of Corinth. This Nemean lion was no normal beast, but an enormous monster whose hide was impenetrable to any weapon.

Hercules tried arrows, sword, and club, but nothing would make an impression. He therefore seized the beast's throat and throttled it to death. He then flayed the creature with the only thing that could cut through its hide, its own razor-sharp claws. Forever after, he wore the lion's hide as a protective shield.

… the helmeted Bellona…

Theseus orders the Queen to stand, and accepts the task, saying:

O no knees, none, widow,
Unto the helmeted Bellona use them,
And pray for me your soldier.

—Act I, scene i, lines 74-76

Bellona is not a member of the Greek mythological group. She is a Roman war goddess (the Latin word for war is *bellum)* and was considered either the wife or sister of Mars. There was a temple to Bellona outside the city of Rome, and the Senate met there when negotiating with foreign ambassadors, or when greeting the return of victorious generals.

… the banks of Aulis…

The Second Queen pleads with Hippolyta, the Third with Emilia. Both are sympathetic but Theseus naturally wishes to continue with the wedding before taking care of Creon. The queens (and even Hippolyta and her sister) plead with Theseus to reverse matters and make war with Creon first.

Theseus agrees at last and says to an officer:

Hence you,
And at the banks of Aulis meet us with

The forces you can raise …

—Act I, scene i, lines 210-12

Aulis was famous as the place where the ships of the Greek host gathered (in the generation after Theseus) to sail to Troy. Shakespeare could not resist, therefore, having Theseus gather *his* army there.

Aulis is on the seacoast of Greece, just where the large island of Euboea comes nearest the mainland, leaving a strait, the Euripus, not more than a mile wide. In these constricted waters a fleet can gather in safety. From Aulis there is a sea voyage of 170 miles northeast, as the crow flies, to reach Troy.

Of what use, however, to assemble at a seaport in order to send an army from Athens to Thebes, since the two cities are separated by land? Thebes is thirty-five miles northwest of Athens, and to travel to Aulis improves the situation very little. Besides, Aulis is in Theban-dominated territory and an Athenian army would very likely have to fight a battle as soon as it gets to Aulis.

Dear Palamon…

The scene now shifts to Thebes, and, specifically, to two young Theban soldiers. One of them begins:

Dear Palamon, dearer in love than blood
And our prime cousin …

—Act I, scene ii, lines 1-2

The speaker is Arcite. Needless to say, nowhere in the Greek body of myth are Palamon and Arcite to be found. They are creations strictly of the medieval romancers. They are ideal medieval knights, brave, noble, chivalrous beyond all qualification, and devoted one to the other.

They are apparently of the family of Oedipus, for as they bemoan the corruption and decadence of Thebes, Palamon begins to lay the worst of the blame on an individual that Arcite guesses at once, saying:

Our uncle Creon.

—Act I, scene ii, line 62

However, the news of Theseus' invasion comes and the two young soldiers, who had been planning to leave Thebes, realize that whatever their disenchantment with the city, they must fight for it against foreign invaders.

… great Apollo's mercy…

The battle is won by Theseus and the bodies of the dead warriors are rescued. They will be given all the proper funeral rites by the queens.

Theseus' victory over Thebes is mentioned, in passing, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see page I-*47)*. An affecting tale concerning Evadne, the First Queen, is not mentioned in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. When her dead husband, Capaneus, was being burned, Evadne found she could not bear to part with him. She threw herself, living, on the fire, and burned to death.

The battle had had another result as well. It brought Palamon and Arcite into Athenian hands as prisoners. The Theban youths fought marvelously, but were overwhelmed and are wounded and near death. Theseus has, however, been impressed by their fighting and orders that physicians attempt to save their lives. He says:

For our love
And great Apollo's mercy, all our best
Their best skill tender.

—Act I, scene iv, lines 45-47

Apollo is the god of the fine arts, and apparently medicine was considered one of them. (He was also the god of disease, for it was his arrows which were pictured as striking down the population of a city struck by the plague.) Asclepius, who is described in the myths as a specific god of medicine, is a son of Apollo.

… a Parthian quiver…

Whereas the entire first act is considered Shakespeare's, most of the second, third, and fourth acts are considered Fletcher's.

Palamon and Arcite are recovered from their wounds, but they are in an Athenian prison now. They are guarded by a jailer who has a pretty daughter. Neither is given a name, but are called merely "Jailer" and "Daughter" in the stage directions. There is also a young man who is in love with the daughter, and he is called only "Wooer."

The two Thebans expect to remain in prison for life and together they mourn the joys they shall never taste again, such as hunting:

> No more now must we halloo, no more shake
> Our pointed javelins, whilst the angry swine
> Flies like a Parthian quiver from our rages,
> Struck with our well-steeled darts.

—Act II, scene i, lines 107-10

The Parthians were an ancient people who ruled over what is now Iraq and Iran and who were noted for their ability as horse archers. The Romans fought them for centuries and were occasionally defeated by them. A boar struck by many darts would be as full of arrows as a Parthian quiver.

The remark is anachronistic, of course, if we consider the time to be really that of Theseus. Parthia did not develop as a nation until about 250 b.c., a full thousand years after the time of Theseus. On the other hand, if we allow our mind to wander forward to medieval times in the Palamon and Arcite scenes, the reference to Parthia ceases to be an anachronism.

> … a noble kinsman

Still, the two young men have each other and it occurs to them that while they are together, they have an important part of life. Each hymns the other's friendship, until it seems that their enforced company brings them to the height of bliss and that such friendship as theirs could not possibly be severed.

At that moment, though, Emilia and a maid come into the garden adjoining the prison. They gather flowers and Emilia comments on the myth of Narcissus (see page I-10).

Even while Palamon and Arcite are swearing total friendship, first Palamon, then Arcite, sees Emilia from a window and instantly (such is the convention of courtly love) falls entirely in love with her to the

point where there is no room for any other emotion.

The two friends are suddenly competitors and Palamon claims sole right to the love since he saw Emilia first and called Arcite's attention to her. Arcite, however, points out that he too is subject to passions and says:

> Why then would you deal so cunningly,
> So strangely, so unlike a noble kinsman,
> To love alone?

—Act II, scene i, lines 250-52

Here is the reference from which the title of the play is taken. Palamon and Arcite are "the two noble kinsmen."

> … against the Maying

The quarrel between them is suspended when Arcite is called away. The news is quickly brought back to Palamon that Arcite, on Pirithous' request, has been released from prison, but banished forever from Athens.

Palamon fears that Arcite, free, may yet lead an army back to Athens to try to win Emilia. Arcite, on the other hand, as he takes the road back to Thebes, fears that Palamon, in Athens, though imprisoned, may have an opportunity to woo and win Emilia.

At this point, Arcite comes upon a group of country people intent on a holiday. One of them says, in fact:

> Do we all hold, against the Maying?

—Act II, scene ii, line 36

Here, as in A Midsummer Night's Dream, that other play set against the Theseus-Hippolyta marriage, we have a group of members of the lower classes arranging a rustic performance. It is a May Day celebration, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to have taken place at May Day too (see page I-45).

Arcite decides to violate the exile order, join the countrymen, and in rustic guise participate in the athletic contests that accompany the May Day celebration.

As we might expect, he wins at wrestling before the eyes of Theseus and the court (who fail to recognize him-all disguises are effective in Shakespearean plays). Arcite even has the happiness of talking to Emilia and being accepted as her servant.

… the King of Pigmies

Arcite does not, however, have it all his own way. The Jailer's Daughter has fallen in love with Palamon and has let him out of his jail cell, though unable, at the moment, to arrange his liberation from the chains upon him.

Palamon finds Arcite and challenges him to a duel, but their old friendship is not entirely gone. Arcite helps him hide, then gets him food and wine, together with files with which to remove the shackles. They even try to reminisce fondly about earlier loves that did not come between them, but then Emilia's name comes up and they are ready for slaughter again.

Meanwhile, however, the poor Daughter, in a series of short scenes by herself, makes a gradual descent from love for Palamon, to a passionate search for him so that she might file off the shackles, to heartbreak at being unable to find him and fearing him dead, and, at last, to madness. She begins to talk nonsense built about her desire to know of the lost and absent Palamon:

> Would I could find a fine frog; he would tell me
> News from all parts o'th'world; then would I make
> A carack of a cockleshell, and sail
> By east and north-east to the King of Pigmies,
> For he tells fortunes rarely.

—Act III, scene iv, lines 12-16

The Pygmies are first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad,* as a dwarfish people who perpetually war against cranes (and who, one would suppose, are therefore small enough to be eaten by cranes). The very word "pygmy" comes from a Greek word meaning the length of the arm from elbow to knuckles, which would imply that the little creatures were about a foot high. They were supposed to live somewhere in Ethiopia, the Greek name for the mysterious regions south of Egypt.

By modern times the Pygmies were dismissed as but another figment of the fertile Greek imagination, but then, oddly enough, a

race of short human beings (not one foot high, to be sure, but averaging some four feet high) were discovered in central Africa in the nineteenth century.

It seems fairly reasonable to suppose that some of them were encountered by Egyptian armies adventuring southward, for, in the time of their stronger dynasties, the Egyptians controlled regions far into what is now the Sudan. Individual pygmies were very likely brought back as prisoners and rumors of such human beings, with the shortness exaggerated, would then serve as the basis for the Greek legend.

The Daughter also sings a sad song which deals with a maiden who searches for her love, and then, worn out and weary, she adds:

> O for a prick now like a nightingale,
> To put my breast against! I shall sleep like a top else.

—Act III, scene iv, lines 25-26

The nightingale's song can be heard all night long and it was a common folk belief that it had to lean against a thorn so that the pain would keep it awake and singing.

> … Meleager and the boar

The countrymen have now worked out a dance with which to amuse and please Theseus and Hippolyta, who are out hunting. (This is reminiscent of the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* which entertained the same couple in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.)*

The countrymen are under the direction of a pedantic schoolmaster who interlards his speech with unnecessarily learned allusions. Thus, he tells them all to hide in the thicket and come out on signal to surprise Theseus:

> / fling my cap up-mark there-then do you,
> As once did Meleager and the boar,
> Break comely out before him…

—Act III, scene v, lines 17-19

Meleager, in the Greek myths, was a king of Calydon in Aetolia.

He is best known in connection with a monstrous boar who had been sent by Diana (Artemis) to ravage the Calydonian countryside. A huge expedition was organized to track down and kill the "Calydonian boar," and, as a matter of fact, Theseus and Pirithous were among the heroes present on the occasion.

At one point in the hunt, the boar came dashing out of the thicket at Theseus, whose hastily thrown javelin went wide. He might have been killed but for the fact that Meleager, who was on the spot, threw more accurately, diverted the beast, then killed him.

Under the circumstances, the schoolmaster's allusion is most inappropriate.

> … dance a morris

As the countrymen take their places, it turns out that one girl is missing. For a moment, it looks as though all is ruined, but the Jailer's Daughter, quite mad, wanders onto the scene and she is at once pressed into service.

Theseus and his party are now coming. The countrymen hide and the schoolmaster confronts Theseus, saying:

> We are a merry rout, or else a rabble
> Or company, or by a figure Chorus,
> That 'fore thy dignity will dance a morris.

—Act III, scene v, lines 105-7

The "morris dance" was part of the May Day celebration. In its origins it was probably some kind of magical rite, involving men in the guise of animals, who are shot at. This may have been a way of ensuring successful hunting, and there may also have been included some general fertility rituals, involving a King and Queen of the May.

Indeed, the schoolmaster mentions them when he enumerates the company. He himself appears first, he says, and then:

> The next the Lord of May, and Lady bright,

—Act III, scene v, line 124

There were other characters as well, including one at least who

made the fertility nature of the celebration unmistakable. He was a farcical fool called the "Bavian" who was equipped with a tail which perhaps showed his descent from the tailed satyrlike fertility spirits of the wildwood. The schoolmaster, in preparing his muster earlier, was concerned lest the fool go too far, for he said:

> Where's the Bavian?
> My friend, carry your tail without offense
> Or scandal to the ladies;

—Act HI, scene v, lines 33-35

But it is clear that the tail is not the only appendage the Bavian has. He has a phallus too, and a prominent one, which can scarcely avoid giving offense if the ladies are in the least delicate. Nevertheless, the schoolmaster in introducing the company before Theseus and his party officiously points out what needs no pointing out:

> … and next the Fool, The Bavian
> with long tail, and eke long tool,

—Act III, scene v, lines 130-31

Perhaps to lessen the pagan character of the May Day celebration and reduce churchly opposition, new and popular characters were introduced in the form of Robin Hood and Maid Marian (as the King and Queen of the May) together with other members of his band. After all, Robin hunted deer and so completely lived in the forest as to be considered almost a spirit of the wildwood. He would fit the celebration, and his popularity would help make the morris dance respectable.

Why morris dance, by the way? One theory is that the dance was brought in from Spain in the time of King Edward III (when his son, the Black Prince, campaigned for a time in that land; see page II-260). It was, according to that view, a Moorish military dance, and from Moorish dance to morris dance is but a step. Another theory is that the dancers blacked themselves as part of their disguise and were Moorish in that sense.

The dance, when given, adds another bit of pageantry to the play.

By Castor. ..

Arcite and Palamon are now ready for their duel. They help each other into armor with every sign of affection and with mutual praise, but they fight in earnest, for the requirements of courtly love are that a knight must sacrifice all else.

Theseus and his company, still hunting, come upon the duelers. Theseus is furious, for dueling is against the law. He says, angrily, even before he knows the identity of the fighters:

By Castor, both shall die.

—Act III, scene vi, line 137

It is unusual to swear by Castor alone, for he is one of an inseparable pair, Castor and Polydeuces (or Pollux). They were twin brothers who were the model of fraternal affection. They were born of Leda and were brothers of Helen, whose beauty later caused the Trojan War.

To swear by Castor is inappropriate for another reason, for Castor and his twin brother were contemporaries of Theseus and were still alive. They had not yet attained the status of gods.

In any case, Theseus' vow does not stand. Everyone, Pirithous, Hippolyta, and Emilia, pleads with him to let the warriors fight it out. Since Emilia refuses to choose between them but offers to accept the winner- quite in line with the conventions of courtly love-Theseus gives them a month's grace and then each, accompanied by three friends apiece, can join battle formally for the hand of the lady.

… as Iris

The Jailer's mad Daughter is back at home now and her faithful Wooer comes anxiously to learn of her. He had seen her roaming the countryside in her madness and had found her as beautiful

… as Iris
Newly dropped down from heaven.

-Act **IV,** scene i, lines 87-88

The name "Iris" means "rainbow" and she was the representation of that phenomenon. Since the rainbow seems like a delicate bridge in the sky, it was easy to imagine that it served as a route between heaven and earth. From the route itself, the name was applied to a messenger who plied that route, and Iris was therefore a messenger, carrying divine orders to mortals and serving Juno (Hera) in particular.

.. wanton Ganymede

Emilia has her problems. She is distressed that either Palamon or Arcite should die for her. She could prevent it if only she could choose between them, but she can't She has a picture of each, and each she in turns admires. Of Arcite, she says:

Just such another wanton Ganymede
Set Jove a-fire with and enforced the god
Snatch up the goodly boy.. .

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 15-16

Ganymede, in the Greek myths, was a beautiful Trojan prince, with whom Jupiter (Zeus) fell in love. Jupiter took on the guise of an eagle and carried Ganymede off, taking him to heaven where he became the wine pourer of the gods. This is another case of homosexuality attributed to the gods, as in the case of Apollo and Hyacinthus (see page I-15)-this time of Jupiter himself.

The use of Jove for Jupiter, as in this passage, is common. Jove is from a Latin word that means simply "god."

… Pelops" shoulder

Of Arcite's brow, Emilia goes on to say that it is

Arched like the great-eyed Juno's, but far sweeter,
Smoother than Pelops" shoulder!

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 20-21

Pelops was the son whom Tantalus killed and served as food for the gods (see page I-13). The gods recognized what was being served them and, with one exception, did not eat of the food. The exception was Deme-ter, who, sorrowing over Proserpina (see page I-7), had absent-mindedly eaten some of the shoulder. The gods, in bringing Pelops back to life, replaced the missing part with ivory so that Pelops' shoulder served, in literature, as a standard for smoothness.

—But then Emilia looks at Palamon's picture and thinks he is equally wonderful. She cannot choose.

> … a piece of silver. ..

While this is going on, the Jailer has brought a doctor to treat his mad daughter. All she can do is talk of Palamon, nothing but Palamon. She thinks Palamon is dead and that in the next world Dido will abandon Aeneas (see page I-20) for Palamon's sake. The reference to Dido is as anachronistic here as it was in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

She seems to be thinking of death herself, to join Palamon in the after-world. This requires certain rites, of course:

> … you must bring a piece of silver
> on the tip of your tongue, or no ferry.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 19-21

The Greeks felt that Charon, the ferrier of the underworld, would not take a shade over the Styx River into Hades unless he were paid, and for the purpose a small coin was usually placed in the corpse's mouth.

> … pick flowers with Proserpine …

The Daughter imagines that once in the Elysian Fields (see page I-13), all would be well:

> we shall come there, and do nothing all day long
> but pick flowers with Proserpine.
> Then will I make Palamon a nose gay…

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 24-26

Proserpina was picking flowers when she was carried off by Hades (see page I-7) and that action is therefore associated with her.

The doctor, listening to all this, decides that the only way the Daughter can possibly be cajoled out of her madness is to let her think she has Palamon. He therefore urges the Wooer to play the part of Palamon in all possible ways. The Wooer agrees and the Daughter accepts him in this role. Mad or not, the play ends happily for these two.

… methought Alcides…

The tournament between the knights led by Arcite and by Palamon is ready to begin, and in the fifth act Shakespeare's pen takes over for heavy pageantry. Both warriors must offer prayer to the gods. Arcite chooses to pray to Mars (Ares), the god of war, and receives the approval of his request for victory in the form of a short burst of thunder.

Palamon chooses to pray not to Mars but to Venus, the goddess of love (a wiser choice by the rules of courtly love), and he receives a positive sign too, in the form of music and doves.

Emilia prays also, to the virginal Diana (Artemis), asking that the one who best loves her should win her. She receives an answer as the sole rose falls from a rosebush.

The tournament is nip and tuck, but it is fought offstage. At first the cries seem to make Palamon the winner, but in the end it is Arcite by a narrow margin and Mars's omen is fulfilled.

Theseus greatly admires both. Palamon, the loser, is highly praised:

… methought Alcides was To him a sow of lead.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 119-20

Greeks generally had a single name. There was considerable chance of duplication, therefore, and it was necessary to identify people by their native cities or by their father's name. One might say "Diomedes, son of Tydeus" (see page I-57), or simply "son of Tydeus," as another way of referring to Diomedes. In Greek fashion, "son of Tydeus" would be "Tydides."

It was difficult to call Hercules by the name of his father, since he

was the son of Jupiter, who had come to his mother Alcmene in the guise of her husband Amphitryon. With Amphitryon notoriously cuckolded, the myth-makers could scarcely call him "Amphitryonides." They evaded the issue by naming him for his grandfather, Alcaeus, Amphitryon's father. He is therefore called Alcides.

And yet though Arcite has won the battle by Mars's grace, Palamon wins the lady by Venus' grace. Arcite, in triumph, mounts a horse who, through accident, throws him and falls upon him. Arcite is brought onstage, dying, and gives his right to Emilia to Palamon. This is justified by Theseus' statement that Arcite had admitted, after all, that Palamon had seen the lady first.

With that, all the rules of courtly love are satisfied and the play can come to an end.

4. The History of Trolius And Cressida

The most famous event in the early history of Greece was the Trojan War, fought a generation after the time of Theseus-or shortly before 1200 b.c. Concerning that war, we have only the legendary tale told by Homer, a Greek poet who supposedly lived in the ninth century b.c.

Whether Homer actually lived, or whether the poems ascribed to him were written by one man or many, has exercised the ingenuity of literary critics for over two thousand years, but that is not the sort of problem that concerns us here.

What does concern us is that the Homeric poems have (along with the Bible and Shakespeare's plays) been the most notable and influential works of literature ever produced in the Western world, and that in 1601 Shakespeare wrote his own version of the Homeric tale.

Shakespeare was by no means the first, nor was he the last, to do a version of Homer.

Homer's poem may have first been put together about 850 b.c. and have been sung or recited by bard after bard, the tale being carried or from generation to generation through oral tradition. About 500 B.c it was carefully edited by Athenian scholars and placed into the form we now have.

Homer tells the tale of but a single episode in the long Trojan War which, according to legend, lasted ten years. The episode takes place in the tenth and last year and deals with a quarrel between two of the Greek leaders, with the near disaster that befalls the Greek cause as a result, and with the dramatic reconciliation that follows after all the participants have suffered tragic losses.

In the course of the epic, hints are given as to events that took place before the incident of the quarrel and of events that were to take place after the reconciliation. The popularity of Homer's tale led later Greek poets and dramatists to try their hand at telling other portions of the tale based on Homer's references and on other legends then extant but no surviving today.

Other ancient writers even tried retelling the tale of the quarrel itself in their own way, and the habit of doing so continued through the Middle Ages and into modern times. In 1925, for instance, the American write:

John Erskine published *The Private Life of Helen of Troy,* putting the tale of Troy into twentieth-century idiom.

Shakespeare tried his hand at it too, producing, alas, a play that is not considered one of his better productions and is by no means

worthy of the grand original.

In Troy …

Shakespeare chooses to tell (more or less) the same incident that concerns Homer, which means that he too must concentrate on the final stages of a long siege. Where Homer was dealing with incidents in a war which (in his time) must have been well known to all Greeks, with its heroes' names being household words, Shakespeare was not quite in the same position.

Educated Englishmen in Shakespeare's time knew of the Trojan War, but chiefly through writings on the subject in Roman and medieval times. It was only toward the end of the sixteenth century that Homer's poem itself was translated into English by George Chapman (whose work inspired a famous sonnet by John Keats two centuries later). At the time *Troilus and Cressida* was being written, only a third of that translation had yet appeared, so it is doubtful how much firsthand knowledge of Homer's actual tale Shakespeare himself had and how much he had to depend on later (and distorted) versions of the Troy tale.

Shakespeare did not apparently feel safe in starting, as Homer did, toward the end of the war, and inserts a somewhat apologetic Prologue to set the stage. The Prologue begins directly:

In Troy there lies the scene.

—Prologue, line 1

The name of the walled city which endured the long siege was, apparently, Ilion (or Ilium, in the Latin spelling). Homer's poem is therefore called the *Iliad.* The region in which Ilium was located was known as Troas or the Troad, and from this, the city took the alternate name of Troia. It is the English form of this latter name, Troy, that is most familiar to us.

It is over three thousand years now since Troy was destroyed and yet, thanks to Homer, its name remains forever fresh to us.

Indeed, it remained fresh and alive through a period in early modern times when skeptical scholars considered the Trojan War to have been purely mythical and were sure that no city of Troy had ever existed. Considering that Homer filled his tale with gods, goddesses, monsters, and wonders, it was easy to feel skepticism.

However, after all the overlay of the marvellous has been scraped

away, a core remains and, as it turns out, that core has value.

A German businessman, Heinrich Schliemann, who implicitly believed the essential truth of the *Iliad* (minus its gods), amassed wealth and *in* the late nineteenth century used it to go to Greece and Turkey, where he hoped to dig up the ruins of Troy and some of the great Greek cities of the time. From the 1860s to his death in 1890, he achieved phenomenal success, locating the site of Troy and other places mentioned in the *Iliad.*

Historians now know quite a bit about the early phase of Greek history, which they call the Mycenaean Age. From what they have learned, we find that Homer's tale is a surprisingly faithful rendering (though with a few anachronisms) of Mycenaean society. Historians are now just as certain that there *was* a siege of Troy, as a century ago they were certain there was not.

… *isles of Greece* The Prologue goes on to describe those who were attacking Troy:

> From isles of Greece
> The princes orgulous, their high blood chafed,
> Have to the port of Athens sent their ships,
>
> —Prologue, lines 1-3

According to the legend, it was a combined expedition of Greek forces drawn from all the petty kingdoms that were then to be found in Greece. In theory, all acknowledged an overlord who ruled in the southern portion of the peninsula and it was this overlord who acted as commander in chief of the expedition.

The overlordship was not tight, however, and the leaders of the various contingents were very aware of their own rights and privileges. There was a strong resemblance between the situation in Mycenaean Greece and that in medieval Europe, where a king was titular overlord but could only with the greatest difficulty induce his various dukes and counts to obey him. Shakespeare was not so far removed from this stage of history to fail to understand it, hence his reference to the princes "orgulous"; that is, "haughty."

The Greek forces, coming from various regions, had to meet at some gathering place to form a unified fleet. According to legend, that meeting place was at Aulis, a harbor in Boeotia, protected by the long island of Euboea (see page I-59).

Shakespeare here makes the gathering place Athens, which is incorrect

… toward Phrygia

Having gathered, the united fleet now moves on across the Aegean Sea toward Troy. The total number of ships is given:

… Sixty and nine, that wore
Their crownets regal, from th'Athenian bay
Put forth toward Phrygia;

—Prologue, lines 5-7

In Mycenaean times, a people we now call the Phrygians were in control of western Asia Minor. They still dominated the area in the supposed time in which Homer lived, three and a half centuries after the Trojan War, so he could speak of them familiarly. Their power was not destroyed till about 700 b.c. when the nomadic Cimmerians from the regions north of the Black Sea invaded Asia Minor and wreaked widespread destruction. The name "Phrygia" was still applied to a region of west central Asia Minor throughout ancient times, however.

The chances are that the Trojans (although pictured in the *Iliad* as being in no way different from the Greeks in language, customs, or religion) were Phrygians.

Shakespeare's mention of 69 ships is an extremely modest underestimate of the legendary number. The *Iliad* lists the numbers of ships brought by each Greek contingent in Book Two and the total comes to 1186. Christopher Marlowe in his play *Dr. Faustus* is closer to Homer, by far, when he has Faustus cry out at seeing the shade of the beautiful woman who, according to legend, brought on the war, "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships-"

The ravished Helen. ..

The basic cause of the expedition was undoubtedly most unromantic. Troy controlled the narrow waters between the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea and was, therefore, master of an important trade route. By charging tolls for passage, they grew rich, and this made the city a valuable prize for any freebooting expedition.

Not only did Troy's wealth form a tempting target, but the Mycenaeans were being prodded from behind. New tribes of Greeks from the north, relatively uncivilized ones called Dorians, were making their pressure felt. Conditions at home were less settled than

they had been and the urge to take part in piratical expeditions overseas increased.

Indeed, the time of the Trojan War was one of great turmoil throughout the civilized world and it was not only Troy that was suffering harm from sea raiders. Other raiders ravaged the coast of Egypt and Canaan, for instance. Certain contingents of these raiders settled down on the Canaan-ite coast and became the Philistines, who strongly influenced Israelite history.

By Homer's time a much more trivial, but much more romantic, cause had been given for the expedition. Shakespeare gives it briefly here. The Greeks, he says, have sworn

> To ransack Troy, within whose strong immures
> The ravished Helen, Menelaus" queen,
> With wanton Paris sleeps-and that's the quarrel.

—Prologue, lines 8-10

In ancient times piratical raids were common. Ships would come ashore and armed men would suddenly snatch up cattle and people, then sail away again. If the people captured (and intended for the slave-market) included any of prominent family, reprisal raids might be carried through. The immediate cause of the Trojan War could well have been such a raid, of which the Trojans may have been guilty or which it siuited the Greeks to say that the Trojans were guilty.

With time, the details of the abduction were adorned and elaborated with complicated myth, and this particular one has become world-famous. I'll give it briefly.

At a certain wedding (involving a bride and groom who will appear later in this chapter) all the gods and goddesses had been invited-with one exception. Eris, the Goddess of Discord, had been overlooked. She appeared unbidden and in anger tossed a golden apple (the "Apple of Discord") among the guests. It bore the label "To the Fairest."

At once three goddesses claimed it: Juno (Hera), the wife of Jupiter (Zeus); Minerva (Athena), the Goddess of Wisdom; and Venus (Aphrodite), the Goddess of Beauty.

The goddesses agreed to accept the decision of Paris, a Trojan prince, and each goddess tried her best to bribe him. Juno offered him power, Minerva offered him wisdom, and Venus offered him the fairest woman in the world for his bride. He chose Venus, which was probably the honest choice in any case.

There was a complication, though. The fairest woman in the

world was Helen, who was already married to Menelaus, King of Sparta.

Guided by Venus, Paris arrived as a guest in Sparta, was royally treated by Menelaus, and then, when Menelaus was off on state affairs, Paris seized the opportunity to abduct the willing Helen (Paris was very handsome) and carry her off to Troy.

Menelaus was rightly angry over this and the result was the Greek expedition against Troy.

> To Tenedos …

The journey of the Greek fleet is followed:

> To Tenedos they come,
> And the deep-drawing barks do there disgorge
> Their warlike fraughtage. Now on Dardan plains
> The fresh and yet unbruised Greeks do pitch
> Their brave pavilions.

—Prologue, lines 11-15

Tenedos is a small island about four miles off the shore of Asia Minor, near Troy.

Troy itself is several miles inland and the plain between itself and the sea is the "Dardan plain." Dardania is a name for a section of the Trojan coast. The name is derived, according to the myth, from Dardanus, a son of Jupiter. A grandson of Dardanus was Tros, from whose name Troy was derived.

Having brought the Greeks to Troy, the Prologue now warns the audience that the play will not start at the beginning:

> … our play
> Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,
> Beginning in the middle,

—Prologue, lines 26-28

> … Troilus, alas …

Yet though the play begins in the middle of a war, it does not

begin with martial scenes or even with martial speeches. It begins with a rather sickly speech of love.

The fault lies not in Homer but in medieval distortions of the tale. In Shakespeare's time the most popular version of the tale of Troy was a twelfth-century French romance, written by Benoit de Sainte-Maure, called *Roman de Troie.* Even that wasn't based on Homer directly, but on works written in late Roman times which were themselves altered versions of the original account.

The *Roman de Troie* was written when the devices of courtly love (see page I-54) were taking France by storm, so that Homer's vigorously masculine tale became prettified with the addition of an artificial love story. It was the love story, rather than the Homeric background, that interested later writers such as Boccaccio in Italy and Chaucer in England, and through them, Shakespeare.

The first scene of *Troilus and Cressida* is in Troy. A young Trojan warrior comes on the scene, sulky and petulant because he is being frustrated in love. He is taking off his armor and won't fight, saying:

> Each Troyan that is master of his heart,
> Let him to field; Troilus, alas, hath none

—Act I, scene i, lines 4-5

As the name of the play tells us, the action is to revolve to a large extent about Troilus, but who is he?

In Homer's *Iliad* he is dead before the action starts, and he receives exactly one mention. Toward the very end of the book, when the aged King of Troy is making ready to go to the Greek camp to try to ransom the dead body of his most heroic son, he berates his remaining sons, saying,[In my quotations from the *Iliad,* I am making use of the recent translation by Robert Graves, *The Anger of Achilles* (Doubleday, 1959).] "Your dead brothers were the best soldiers in my dominions. Mestor, Troilus the Chariot-Fighter, and Hector, a very god among men-yes, his aspect was rather divine than human-fallen and gone, and mere dregs left me."

That is all; nothing more..

The later poets and commentators filled in the gap, though, and invented various tales concerning Troilus that agreed in only one respect: he was eventually killed by Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors.

Since Troilus is heroic and since his tale is not told (and therefore fixed) by Homer, there is room left for addition in medieval fashion, when the medieval writers took their turn. It was Troilus to whom the

tale of courtly love was affixed.

> I'll not meddle…

With Troilus is an older man, Pandarus, who listens impatiently to the young hero's sighs. Apparently he has been doing his best to bring the love affair to a happy conclusion. Now he pretends to lose patience, saying:

> Well, I have told you enough of this.
> For my part, I'll not meddle nor make no farther.

—Act I, scene i, lines 13-14

Who is Pandarus? In the *Iliad* there is indeed a character by this name. He is pictured as an expert archer and appears in Homer's tale on two separate occasions.

His first appearance is in Book Four of the *Iliad.* A truce has been declared between the armies and for a moment it seems as though the war may end in a compromise with Helen returned and Troy left standing. Pandarus, however, treacherously shoots an arrow at Menelaus and wounds him. The war goes on.

Pandarus makes a second appearance in Book Five. He shoots an arrow at Diomedes, one of the major Greek heroes, and wounds him slightly. A little later, he encounters the enraged Greek at close range and is himself killed. Exit Pandarus.

Shakespeare's Pandarus has no more in common with this other one than the name. In *Troilus and Cressida* Pandarus is a genial old man, very interested in sex-a kind of voyeur, in fact-and so unashamed in his vicarious delight over the whole matter that he has given the word "pander" to the English language.

To be sure, it is not Shakespeare who is entirely responsible for this change. Pandarus appears as Pandaro in a short poem ("Filostrato") about this love affair published by the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio in 1338. In "Filostrato" Pandaro is the cousin of the girl whom Troilus loves.

The English poet Chaucer (see page I-54) published in 1385 *Troilus and Criseyde,* a much longer work, based on "Filostrato." In it Pandaro, the girl's cousin, became Pandare, the girl's uncle.

It was Shakespeare next who, using Chaucer's poem as a main source, wrote *Troilus and Cressida* and changed Pandare to Pandarus.

… fair Cressid.. .

Bumblingly, Pandarus urges patience on Troilus, and Troilus retorts that he is already superhumanly patient. He says:

> At Priam's royal table do I sit,
> And when fair Cressid comes into my thoughts-

—Act I, scene i, lines 31-32

Priam is King of Troy, the figure of a royal patriarch. He has, all told, fifty sons and twelve daughters by various wives, and Troilus is one of the sons. When the Greek expedition arrived before the walls of Troy, Priam was too old to fight, but he was still in full authority as king.

As for "fair Cressid," who is she? She is Pandarus' niece in the play and it is she with whom Troilus is in love, but where does she come from? She is not mentioned, not once, in the *Iliad*.

Yet, even so, we can trace her origin from the very first book of the *Iliad*. In that first book, Homer relates the cause of a quarrel between Agamemnon, the commander in chief of the Greek forces, and the greatest warrior in those forces, Achilles.

The army, it seems, has conducted a raid, carried off captives, and divided the loot. Agamemnon's share included a girl named Chryseis, while Achilles' share included another girl named Briseis. (The similarity in names is unfortunate and is a sure source of confusion.)

It turns out that Chryseis is the daughter of Chryses, a priest of Apollo. The priest comes to the camp to retrieve his daughter but when he is brusquely turned away by Agamemnon, Apollo (answering his priest's prayer) sends plague into the Greek camp. As a result, Achilles urges Agamemnon to return Chryseis and Agamemnon pettishly insists that, in that case, he will appropriate Briseis in return.

The quarrel flares and Achilles, in a rage, declares he will retire to his tent. He and his warriors will fight no more on behalf of this miserable leader. (And surely, our sympathies are all with the wronged Achilles at the start.)

The argument rests entirely on a matter of prestige. Agamemnon's view is that his prerogative as commander in chief is unassailable. Achilles insists that the commander in chief cannot hide behind his office while committing an injustice. The matter of the girls is a trifling symbol of the clash between central authority and individual rights. Homer does not introduce the thought that Agamemnon might

be in love with Chryseis or Achilles with Briseis; certainly not in the medieval sense.

Later writers, however, more romantic than Homer and far less able, cannot resist stressing the love story, and make Achilles in love with Briseis.

In Benoit's medieval *Roman de Troie,* another factor is brought in to further complicate the matter and make the love tale even more interesting. The Trojan prince Troilus is also in love with Briseis, so that now there is a triangle of men, Agamemnon, Achilles, and Troilus, all competing for her.

Benoit distorts the name, and "Briseis" becomes "Briseide." Since it is almost impossible to avoid confusing "Briseis" with "Chryseis," "Briseide" easily becomes "Criseide." Hence Chaucer wrote of Troilus and Criseyde; and by a further small change Shakespeare wrote of Troilus and Cressida.

> … Hector or my father.. .

Poor Troilus also complains that he must hide his aching heart and conceal the fact that he is hopelessly in love:

> Lest Hector or my father should perceive me

—Act I, scene i, line 38

Hector was Priam's oldest son, his father's surrogate in the field, the commander in chief of the Trojan armies. He is the best and greatest warrior on the Trojan side, second only to Achilles as a fighter. He is one of the most attractive personalities in the *Iliad* and is the picture of patriotism.

The bias in his favor is far more pronounced in medieval versions of the tale, since the Trojans were supposed to be the ancestors of the Romans, and Rome always had a "good press" in the Middle Ages. Such a bias may also be expected in Shakespeare's play and it is there. Shakespeare consistently pictures Hector as braver and better than Achilles, for instance.

Why Troilus should be so reluctant to let Priam or Hector know of his love is not made clear in the play. One might argue that it was a time to fight and not to love and that father and older brother would object to having young Troilus moon away his time when the city was in such peril. More likely, however, courtly love is, by convention, supposed to be barred by tremendous hurdles; barriers of law or caste,

parental disapproval, royal disfavor, and so on. Troilus must not be allowed to have it too easy, therefore.

… somewhat darker than Helen's

As for Pandarus, it is his task at the moment to keep Troilus' love in flame by a skillful praising of Cressida, saying:

An her hair were not somewhat darker than Helen's

—Act I, scene i, lines 43-44

He does not go on and really, the implication that Cressida might almost be compared with Helen can only be considered humorous.

Ever since the tale of the Trojan War has been extant, Helen has been considered beauty incarnate and beyond comparison. Notice, though, the implication that darker hair is, in itself, a blot on beauty (see page I-436).

… Cassandra's wit…

Pandarus continues to praise Cressida. Having compared her physical attributes with Helen's, in bumbling style, he searches for a way of praising her mind. He says:

… I would somebody had heard
her talk yesterday, as I did. I will not
dispraise your sister Cassandra's wit, but-

—Act I, scene i, lines 47-49

Cassandra was one of Priam's daughters Ad the most tragic of them. She was beloved by Apollo and had promise to yield to him if he would give her the gift of prophecy. When he had granted her that favor she nevertheless remained obdurate. The divine gift could not be withdrawn, but in revenge Apollo decreed that no one would ever believe her true prophecies. In other words, people believed her mad.

The comparison, then, with Cassandra in natter of wit is but another bumble, calculated, perhaps, to draw a laugh from the more knowing in the audience.

… behind her father …

Troilus continues to bemoan his fate, obvious to Pandaras' wheedling. The go-between therefore tries the other extreme. Violently, he disowns the whole business and washes his hands of i He will do nothing further for Troilus and says:

> She's a fool to stay behind her father.
> Let her to the Greeks, and so
> I'll tell her the next time I see her.

—Act I, scene i, lines 83-85

Cressida's father is Calchas, a priest of Apdo. If Cressida's name is derived from the *Iliad's* Chryseis, her father's name must be derived from the name of Chryseis' father, Chryses. He too was a priest of Apollo.

Why "Calchas" from "Chryses"? Because there is also a Calchas in the *Iliad.* He is a skilled prophet or soothsayer on the Greek side, and can interpret the omens. It is he, for instance, who explained that the plague striking at the Greeks was the result of Agamemnon's refusal to surrender Chryseis to her father. Both Chryses and Calchas are thus involved in the demand that Agamemnon surrender Chryseis.

There is no hint in the *Iliad* that Calchas: anything but a Greek and certainly there is no confusion between him ad Chryses. In later stories, however, the confusion arises. Chryses the "Trojan priest of Apollo and Calchas the Greek soothsayer are combined ad the story arises that Calchas, a Trojan priest of Apollo, knowing through his prophetic arts that Troy must fall, deserts to the Greeks.

The story of the lost daughter is retained, though. Since Calchas/ Chryses has now turned voluntarily to the Greeks to remain with them permanently, he can't be trying to retrieve a daughter from the Greeks. After all, *he's* there. He must, therefore, be trying to retrieve a daughter from the Trojan camp, a daughter he left behind in deserting to the Greeks. And it is this Trojan daughter, Cressida/Chryseis, whom Troilus loves.

> … thy Daphne's love

Troilus is at once anxious to placate Pandarus, who, after all, remains the only bridge by which he can reach Cressida. Pandarus, however, pushing his advantage, rushes off, leaving Troilus behind to sing Cressida's praises, calling on Apollo (the god of poetry) to help

him:

> Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne's love,
> What Cressid is…

—Act I, scene i, 102-3

It is interesting that Apollo, the personification of male beauty, is so often tragically unsuccessful in his loves. Cassandra refused him, for instance, and Daphne (see page I-36) is an even more famous love.

> What news, Aeneas.. .

Troilus' soliloquy ends when another Trojan warrior enters. He is in full armor, on his way to the battle, and is rather puzzled that Troilus is lingering in Troy. Troilus asks:

> What news, Aeneas, from the field today?

—Act I, scene i, line 11:

Aeneas, in the legends, is a son of none other than Venus, though hi father, Anchises, was a mortal man. Aeneas was not a Trojan exactly but a Dardanian; that is, the inhabitant of a district neighboring Troy proper He attempted to maintain neutrality in the war at first but the attacks c Achilles forced him to join forces with Priam and his sons.

None of this is in the *Iliad.* In the *Iliad* he is an ardent Trojan fighter second only to Hector. He is a darling of the gods and is saved by Venus and Apollo when about to be killed by Diomedes, and on another occasion by Neptune, when it is Achilles who is about to kill him.

Homer makes it quite plain that Aeneas is not fated to die in the general sack that destroys Troy (see page I-209). This was the basis of Vergil plot in the *Aeneid,* which deals with the wanderings of Aeneas after the destruction of Troy.

Because Aeneas was viewed as the ancestor of the Romans, he had to be treated with particular care by Western poets. The English had to 1 even more careful, for they aped the Romans in their search for a glorious beginning.

Several medieval chroniclers in England composed versions of a legendary past that traced the early Britons back to Troy. It seems, according them, that Aeneas had had a great-grandson, Brute, who, having inadvertently killed his father, fled Italy and finally landed in the northern island, which got its name of "Britain" from him.

There is absolutely nothing to it, of course, other than the accidental similarity between the common Roman name Brute or Brutus and the name of Britain. Nevertheless it gave the English a profound interest in the tale of Troy and a strong pro-Trojan sympathy. In particular, Aeneas must be, and is, idealized. In *Troilus and Cressida* he is gay, debonair, and the perfect medieval knight.

… Menelaus' horn

Aeneas tells Troilus that Paris has been wounded in a duel with Menelaus. (Such a duel is described in Book Three of the *Iliad* and it is after that duel, which Menelaus wins, that a truce is negotiated, a truce which is broken by Pandarus' arrow-see page I-79).

Troilus shrugs it off:

> Let Paris bleed; 'tis but a scar to scorn:
> Paris is gored with Menelaus' horn.

—Act I, scene i, lines 115-16

There was an accepted convention in Shakespearean England that a betrayed husband had horns; invisible ones, of course. This may be from a consideration of the sexual life of the polygamous stags, who fight each other for the possession of a harem of does. The deceived husband is, perhaps, likened to a defeated stag; hence his horns.

The husband whose wife had fooled him was universally viewed with amused contempt in Shakespeare's time. This attitude arose, perhaps, from the conventions of courtly love, (see page I-54) where the knight was, ideally, supposed to love the wife of another. In all such tales, the husband was the villain (witness the well-known romance of Tristan and Iseult) and the audience cheered when the horns were, so to speak, placed on his forehead.

The betrayed husband was therefore an inexhaustible theme for comedy and any mention of horns or horned animals, even any reference to foreheads, was the signal for laughter-and Shakespeare made the most of that.

Thus it is that Troilus scorns poor wronged Menelaus. To modern ears, which do not find adultery either as serious or as comic as the

Elizabethans did, such jests fall flat.

Queen Hecuba …

The scene shifts to Cressida now. She enters with her servant, Alexander, looking after two women who have hastened by. She inquires who those were who passed and Alexander answers:

Queen Hecuba and Helen.

—Act I, scene ii, line 1b

Queen Hecuba (or Hecabe, in the Greek form) was the second wife of Priam. She bore him nineteen of his sixty-two children, including Hector, Paris, Troilus, and Cassandra of those mentioned so far. Because of her sufferings, she was a favorite character in tragic dramas devoted to the Trojan War and, indeed, in *Hamlet* Shakespeare makes use of this fact indirectly (see page II-115). Here, in *Troilus and Cressida,* however, she never appears onstage.

He chid Andromache …

Apparently the two women are hastening to the walls to see the battle, for they fear it may be going poorly. After all, even Hector is perturbed, or as the servant says:

Hector, whose patience Is as a virtue fixed, today was moved.
He chid Andromache, and struck his armorer,

—Act I, scene ii, lines 4-6

Andromache is Hector's wife. The last part of Book Six of the *Iliad* is devoted to a scene in which she hurries with her infant son, Scamandrius, to meet Hector before he leaves the city on his way to the battle. It is the most touching scene of married love in Homer. Andromache pleads with Hector to stay in the city, for all her own relatives are dead. "So, dear Hector," she says, "you are now not merely my husband-you are father, mother, and brother, too!"

But Hector must go and he reaches out his arms to give his son a farewell and to pray over him, hoping that someday the child's feats will be such that all will agree that "His father was the lesser man!"

Alas, it was not to be, for Hector's son was killed when Troy was destroyed.

A lord of Troyan blood.,.

To make Hector scold Andromache, something most unusual must have happened. Cressida asks what that might be and is told:

… there is among the Greeks
A lord of Troyan blood, nephew to Hector;
They call him Ajax.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 12-14

Ajax plays a great role in the *Iliad.* He is one of two men in the epic that bears the name. Since the one here referred to is particularly large, he is called "Ajax the Greater." Of the two, only "the Greater" appears in *Troilus and Cressida,* so it suffices to call him Ajax.

In the *Iliad* Ajax is the strongest of the Greeks, save only for Achilles, but is considerably more renowned for his strength than for his subtlety. He is never wounded in the *Iliad,* and he is the only important hero who never at any time personally receives the help of a god or a goddess. He is the epitome of success through hard work, without inspiration.

He is not, in the *Iliad,* of Trojan blood; nor is he a nephew to Hector. The attribution of Trojan blood to Ajax is probably the result of confusion with Ajax's half brother (see page I-103).

… a gouty Briareus …

Alexander goes on to describe Ajax and makes him out to be a parody of the picture presented in Homer; as nothing more than a stolid, dim-witted man-mountain. He says of Ajax:

… he is a gouty Briareus, many hands and no use,
or purblind Argus, all eyes and no sight.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 29-30

Briareus was an earthborn monster with fifty heads and a hundred arms. The most important myth in which he figured was one

in which the tale of a revolt against Jupiter is central. The other gods, led by Neptune and Apollo, succeed in binding Jupiter, and he might have been overthrown, but for the action of a sea nymph, who hastily brought Briareus to the rescue. The monster untied Jupiter and by his presence cowed the other gods.

As for Argus, he was a monster with a hundred eyes who was sent by Juno (Hera) in order that he might watch the nymph Io. Io had been one of Jupiter's many loves, and that god had turned her into a heifer to hide her from Juno, but unsuccessfully. Argus' vigilance (his eyes never closed in unison; fifty at least were always open and alert) would prevent Jupiter from ever turning Io back into human form.

Jupiter sent Mercury (Hermes) to the rescue. Mercury lulled Argus to a simultaneous hundred-eyed sleep with a soothing lullaby and then cut off his head. Juno placed Argus' many eyes in the tail of her favorite bird, the peacock.

Alexander's description of Ajax, in other words, is that of a man who has all the physical attributes required for a warrior but who lacks the intelligence to make those attributes work for him.

And, apparently, what bothers Hector is that this mule of a man has struck him down. Hector cannot help but feel the shame of it.

> That's Anterior …

Pandarus arrives on the scene and at once begins busily to praise Troilus, hoping to arouse Cressida's ardor. Cressida, who knows exactly what he is doing, teases him unmercifully by never allowing his praises to stand but turning everything on its head.

Soon the men are returning from the field at the close of the day, and Pandarus decides to let Troilus' own appearance do the talking. He leads Cressida to a place where she can see them, continuing to promise her Troilus, but naming the others as they pass.

Aeneas passes first and is praised, of course. (Aeneas is always praised-he must be.) Then comes another, and Pandarus says:

> That's Anterior. He has a shrewd wit, I can tell you;
> and he's man good enough-he's one
> o' the soundest judgments in Troy whosoever. ..

—Act I, scene ii, lines 197-99

In the *Iliad* Antenor was one of the elders of Troy. He was a councilor of Priam and a man of good judgment, as Shakespeare says,

but far too old to fight. There is undoubtedly confusion here with Agenor, his son, who in the *Iliad* plays an important role as a Trojan warrior.

That's Helenus …

Pandarus' fussing becomes funnier and funnier. Hector and Paris pass and he praises them with forced enthusiasm, but keeps watching for Troilus and growing constantly more upset because Troilus doesn't appear.

When Cressida asks the name of one of the passing warriors, Pandarus answers absently:

That's Helenus. 1 marvel where Troilus is.
That's Helenus. I think he went not forth today.
That's Helenus.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 227-29

Helenus was another son of Priam and Hecuba,, and, according to some accounts, a twin brother of Cassandra. He was likewise blessed with the powers of a soothsayer and was a priest. He was the only one of Priam's sons to survive the fall of Troy (perhaps because of his priestly character) and in the end, according to some of the later tales, married Andromache, Hector's widow. Together they ended their lives ruling over Epirus, a district in northwestern Greece.

… That's Deiphobus

But Cressida is still teasing Pandarus unmercifully. She clearly knows all the men whom Pandarus is identifying. In fact, she sees Troilus before Pandarus does and asks in mock disdain:

What sneaking fellow comes yonder?

—Act I, scene ii, line 234

And, at the crisis, Pandarus fails to recognize him after all, saying:

Where? Yonder? That's Deiphobus.

—Act I, scene ii, line 235

Only belatedly does he realize it is Troilus.

Deiphobus is still another son of Priam and Hecuba. After Paris dies in battle, it is he who next marries Helen. As a result, when Troy is taken, he is killed by Menelaus and his corpse is hideously mangled.

Pandarus makes up for his tardiness in recognizing Troilus by setting up such a caterwauling after him that Cressida is embarrassed; not so embarrassed, however, that she fails to continue her teasing.

It is only after Pandarus leaves that she reveals in a soliloquy that she is actually in love with Troilus, but holds off because she thinks women are valued only as long as they are not attained.

> … after seven years' siege.. .

With the third scene we find ourselves in the Greek camp for the first time.

There is a general air of depression over the camp and Agamemnon, the commander in chief, is trying to instill heart in the warriors. Their troubles are, after all, long-standing ones, so why be disheartened now?

> … is it matter new to us
> That we come short of our suppose so far
> That after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand;

-Act I, scene iii, lines 10-12

If this is the last year of the war, as it must be, then Troy's walls have been standing nine years, not seven-but that is a small error that makes no difference.

Agamemnon goes on to point out that the difficulty of the task but tests their mettle and tries their worth.

Agamemnon is in a difficult position, for as commander in chief of the Greek army, the chief odium will fall upon him if the expedition fails. He is commander in chief because he is the king of Mycenae, which at the time of the Trojan War was the chief city of Greece and gave its name to the Mycenaean Age. It declined soon after the Trojan War thanks to the devastation that accompanied the Dorian conquest

of much of Greece. It was but a disregarded village in the days of Greece's greatest period, centuries later.

Mycenae, located in the northeastern Peloponnesus, six miles north of Argos, has been excavated in the last century, and ample evidence has been discovered of past greatness.

Agamemnon was the grandson of Pelops (see page I-68) and, in theory, he ruled over all of Greece, though in actual fact the princes of northern Greece (Achilles among them) were restive in the face of the claims of leadership on the part of the southern city, Mycenae.

He was married to Clytemnestra, the daughter of Tyndareus, King of Sparta, a city located some fifty-five miles south of Mycenae.

The younger sister of Clytemnestra was none other than Helen, over whom the Greeks and Trojans were fighting. Helen's beauty was such that her life, from beginning to end, was one of fatal attraction to men. While she was still a young girl of twelve, she was kidnapped, according to the legends, by the Athenian hero Theseus. She was rescued by her brothers, Castor and Polydeuces, and after she was restored, her father, Tyndareus, decided to marry her off and let her husband have the responsibility of holding her.

That was easier said than done, for when the word went out that Helen's hand was to be given in marriage, all the heroes of Greece came to Sparta to compete for her. It seemed impossible to choose one without making enemies of all the others.

It was Ulysses who had the solution. He had no real hope of gaining Helen for himself. He suggested to Tyndareus, therefore, that the competing heroes all be required to take an oath to agree to whatever decision was made as to Helen's husband and to promise to support that husband against anyone who might attempt to take Helen away from him. This was done and Ulysses was rewarded with the hand of Penelope, Helen's cousin.

It was Menelaus who was chosen as Helen's husband. For one thing, he was wealthy; for another, he was the younger brother of the King of Mycenae, Agamemnon.

Agamemnon himself could not compete for Helen because he was already married, but he pressed hard on behalf of his younger brother, and it was very likely because of the prestige and pressure of the "Great King" that Menelaus was accepted.

This was a good stroke of policy on Agamemnon's part. Menelaus succeeded to the throne of Sparta, as Helen's husband. Since Menelaus was a rather passive character, dominated by his more forceful brother, Agamemnon found himself greatly strengthened by his indirect control of the important city of Sparta.

By the same token, Paris' abduction of Helen was a serious blow to Agamemnon, for it weakened Menelaus' claim on the Spartan

throne (which was Helen's rather than his own). Agamemnon had to push hard for a punitive expedition on Troy, and it may have been, again, the influence of the Great King, rather than any vow, which gathered the feudal lords of Greece into the expedition.

In the *Iliad* Agamemnon does not shine. His quarrel with Achilles, in which the Great King is entirely in the wrong, nearly wrecks the Greek cause, and on more than one occasion Homer (who is always respectful to him) shows him being deservedly corrected by others.

> … Nestor shall apply

When Agamemnon is done, the oldest of the Greek leaders stands up to second his words:

> With due observance of thy godlike seat,
> Great Agamemnon, Nestor shall apply Thy latest words.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 31-33

In the *Iliad* Nestor is active among the Greeks despite the fact that he is described as ruling over the third generation of subjects. Although he is so old, he survives to see Troy sacked. Then, ten years after the fall of that city, when the last of the Greek warriors returns home, Nestor is still alive and still ruling in his city of Pylos on the southwestern shore of Greece. Pylos, like Mycenae, was an important center in the time of the Trojan War, but faded away in later tunes. It left not even a village behind.

The frequent reference to Nestor's age made some of the Roman writers grant him two hundred years, but that is not really necessary. In the Mycenaean Age it is quite likely that the life expectancy would be no more than twenty-five to thirty years, and that few men would reach forty before violence or disease laid them low. If Nestor was seventy years old at the time of the play he would be ruling over the third generation of men, and even ten years after the fall of Troy, he would be only eighty.

An occasional person could reach such an age, even in the short-lived times of the ancients, but certainly he would represent a marvel.

In the *Iliad* Nestor is shown in the field, driving his chariot. He does not actually engage in combat, but he is always there overseeing his forces. What's more, he is constantly giving advice in long-winded speeches, and although no one in the *Iliad* ever indicates that he is bored by Nestor, it seems clear that Nestor is a bore just the same. He

is forever recalling the feats of his youth and one gets the idea that the same feats must surely have been recalled over and over again. The old man seems more obviously a bore in Shakespeare's version.

> The gentle Thetis …

Nestor seconds Agamemnon's views. The old man points out that any-} one can succeed when the task is easy, but that great enterprises call out the best in man. On calm seas, any ship can sail, but on stormy seas, it is the strong vessel that makes its mark. Nestor says:

> But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
> The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
> The strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains cut,
> Bounding between the two moist elements
> Like Perseus' horse,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 38-42

Boreas is the personification of the north wind and Thetis is used here as the personification of the ocean, but that is wrong. There is common confusion between Thetis and Tethys. The latter was a Titaness and the wife of Oceanus (who is clearly the god of the ocean), so that Tethys can serve as a feminine version of the personification.

Thetis, in her own right, plays an important role in the Greek myths and in the *Iliad* particularly. She is a sea nymph (all the easier to confuse her with Tethys) and it was she who brought Briareus to the rescue of Jupiter (see page I-86).

Thetis' beauty was such that both Jupiter and Neptune tried to win her, until they found out she was fated to have a son stronger than his father. It was unsafe for either god, or any god, to marry her in that case, and she was forced to marry a mortal. The mortal chosen was a Thessalian prince named Peleus, and at the marriage (pushed through much against the will of Thetis) all the gods and goddesses assembled.

It was at this wedding that Eris appeared with her Apple of Discord. What's more, born of this marriage was Achilles, who was, indeed, far stronger than his father Peleus.

In the *Iliad* Thetis makes several appearances in her role as Achilles' mother, bewailing the fact that her son was fated to endless glory but short life.

The reference to Perseus' horse is to the famous winged stallion Pegasus. Perseus was a Greek hero in the generations before the Trojan War, whose great feat was the destruction of Medusa, one of the three Gorgons, whose appearance was so fearful that they turned to stone anyone who looked at them. With divine help, Perseus was able to cut off the head of Medusa. The blood that dripped from it, on striking the ground, gave rise to Pegasus, who leaped up at once and winged his way into the sky. In that sense, he was Perseus' horse, though there was no further connection between the two.

… hear Ulysses speak

When Nestor is finished, the shrewdest of the Greeks arises, and addressing the two preceding speakers says:

> … let it please both Thou great, and wise,
> to hear Ulysses speak.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 68-69

As Nestor is the very personification of the rather tedious wisdom of age, so Ulysses (Odysseus) is the very personification of shrewdness and clever, but not always ethical, strategy. This comes out even better in Homer's companion poem, the *Odyssey,* which deals with Ulysses' return home after the fall of Troy, and of the ten years of adventures he survives through cleverness and endurance.

The later tales of the Troy cycle attributed to Ulysses all the clever stratagems devised by the Greeks, notably that of the wooden horse itself, with which the fall of Troy was finally encompassed. Since cleverness easily degenerates into slyness and rascality, some of the later myths picture Ulysses as a deceitful coward. None of that, however, appears anywhere in Homer, where Ulysses is depicted as uniformly admirable. Nor does it appear in Shakespeare's play.

… Prince of Ithaca

Agamemnon says at once:

> Speak, Prince of Ithaca;

—Act I, scene iii, line 70

Ithaca is the home island of Ulysses; its exact location is not certain. Indeed, it has been an interesting game among classical scholars to try to determine which Greek island it might be from the descriptions given in the *Odyssey*.

The general feeling is that it is one of the Ionian Islands off the west coast of Greece. The particular island (called "Ithake" on modern maps) is small, only thirty-six square miles in area, and some twenty miles from the mainland. It is surrounded by larger islands, which presumably also represented part of Ulysses' domain.

> … rank Thersites …

Agamemnon states that there is as much chance that Ulysses will utter folly as that:

> When rank Thersites opes his mastic jaws,
> We shall hear music, wit, and oracle.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 73-74

Thersites plays one small part in the *Iliad*. He is the only common man, the only non-aristocrat, mentioned by name, and Homer has a field day at his expense, describing him as: "-a certain Thersites, who had no control over his tongue, and poured out an endless stream of abuse against his superiors, saying whatever came into his head that might raise a laugh. Thersites was by far the ugliest man in the Greek army: bandylegged, lame, hump-backed, crook-necked and bald."

His appearance is in Book Two, where as a result of a miscalculation by Agamemnon, the Greek army is about to break up and make for home. Ulysses is desperately trying to stop them when Thersites breaks into invective against Agamemnon and keeps it up until he is stopped by a blow from Ulysses and some stern words.

That is all! It must be remembered that the *Iliad* was written about aristocrats and for an aristocratic audience, and, moreover, that it was aristocratic patronage that kept bards in comfort. Homer and those like him could scarcely afford to portray a common man successfully running down warriors and noblemen.

And yet, if one reads Thersites' speech in the one scene given him, it makes good sense. He scolds Agamemnon for hogging the best of the loot and for offending Achilles, on whom the Greek victory most

depends. It was all true enough, and the blow he received did not alter that fact. Homer may have been having his moment of grim fun with the aristocrats.

Shakespeare, who was likewise patronized by aristocrats and who likewise rarely showed the common people in a good light, adopted Thersites as part of the comic relief in the play, though it is black comedy indeed. Thersites' mastic (that is, abusive) jaws never open without spewing out untold bitterness, and we are prepared for that in this comment of Agamemnon's.

> … the glorious planet Sol

Ulysses points out that the trouble with the Greek force rests in its divisions, the existence within it of factions that neutralize its efforts. This lack of central authority, he maintains, is against nature itself, for inanimate nature shows the beneficial effects of order even in the heavens, where the planets move through the sky in strict accordance with certain rules:

> And therefore is the glorious planet
> Sol In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
> Amidst the other; whose med'cinable eye
> Corrects the influence of evil planets,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 89-92

"Sol" is the Latin word for "sun" and is the personification of the sun in the Roman myths.

This passage sounds as though Shakespeare, through Ulysses' mouth, is proclaiming the sun to be the ruler of the planets, for he is "in noble eminence enthroned" and he governs and controls the others.

If so, this is a startlingly modern view, not only for Ulysses, but even for Shakespeare, for it seems to refer to the heliocentric theory of the solar system, which places the sun at the center and makes the planets (including the earth itself) revolve about it. The mere fact that the sun is at the center would make it appear to rule the planetary system (so that it is a *solar* system), and Isaac Newton eventually showed, some sixty-seven years after Shakespeare's death, that the sun's overwhelming gravitational force did, indeed, keep the planets in their place.

It is surprising that Shakespeare should seem to be giving this impression, for all through his plays he shows himself a complete

conservative as far as science is concerned and accepts only the Greek view of the universe. To be sure, some Greeks, notably Aristarchus of Samos, about 250 b.c., claimed the sun was the center of the planetary system, but few listened to them, and the Greek majority view continued to place the earth at the center. This latter doctrine was made final by the grand synthesis of the astronomer Ptolemy, about a.d. 150. (The earth-at-center theory is therefore called the "Ptolemaic system" in consequence.)

In 1543 Copernicus advanced the same notion that Aristarchus once had, but with much more detailed reasoning. His view was not accepted by most scholars for a long time, and in Shakespeare's lifetime the Copernican view was still widely considered rather far out and blasphemous.

Can Shakespeare, then, be taking the progressive Copernican view against the conservative Ptolemaic attitude?

No! That he remains conservative is clear at several points. He refers, for instance, to the "planet Sol." The Greeks observed that several heavenly bodies shifted position constantly against the background of non-shifting of "fixed" stars. These bodies they called "planets," meaning, in English, "wanderers." The known planets included the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, seven bodies in all.

Once the Copernican view of the planetary system was established, it seemed unreasonable to call the sun a planet, since it didn't wander among the stars, really, but was thought to be the motionless center of the planetary system.

It fell out of fashion to call the sun a planet, therefore. The name "planet" was then applied only to those bodies which revolved about the sun. This meant that the earth itself would have to be viewed as a planet. The moon revolves about the earth, the only body to retain its Ptolemaic position, and it is not, strictly speaking, viewed as a planet any longer. It is a satellite. Of the Greek planets, therefore, only Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn retain the name and to these are added the earth and the planetary bodies since discovered: Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, and a host of tiny bodies called planetoids or asteroids.

Shakespeare refers to Sol as a planet, however, thus insisting that the sun moves and is not the center of the planetary system. He has the sun not merely enthroned but also "sphered." That is, it is embedded in a sphere that encircles the earth (see page I-25), whereas if it were the center of the planetary system, it could not be part of a sphere.

Finally, in speaking of the necessity of order in the heavens, Shakespeare has Ulysses say, a bit earlier in the speech:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center
Observe degree, priority, and place.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 85-86

That makes a clear distinction between the planets and "this center," that is, earth.

If the sun is "in noble eminence enthroned," then, it is only because, in Shakespeare's view, it is the brightest and most magnificent of the planets and not because it has a central position.

In evil mixture …

Ulysses goes on to point out the harmful effects of disorder in the heavens:

But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 94-96

This seems to reflect the universal belief in astrology in Greek times, in Shakespeare's times, and, for that matter, in our own times. The planets were supposed to influence matters on earth by their ever changing positions against the stars and relative to each other. Certain positions foreboded evil and therefore represented "the planets in evil mixture."

And yet the motions of the planets followed a fixed pattern that could be worked out, and was worked out, by Greek astronomers (a thousand years after the Trojan War, to be sure) so that such "evil mixture" could not really represent disorder. They followed inevitably from planetary motion.

There were, however, some heavenly phenomena which were very spectacular and which took place only rarely; notably eclipses of the sun and of the moon. These therefore were particularly baleful and frightening, and remained signs of apparent disorder in the heavens even after they had been explained astronomically and had been proven to be predictable.

Still more frightening and disorderly were the occasional

appearances of comets, whose comings and goings seemed utterly erratic and were shown to be governed by the sun's gravitational field only two centuries *after* Shakespeare's death.

The great Achilles …

Having established (most eloquently) the general principle that only in centralized authority accepted by all, only in an established hierarchy of mastery, is order and efficiency to be found, Ulysses descends to specifics. Agamemnon should be the autocratic head of the enterprise against Troy, but his subordinates flout him and, in particular:

> The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns
> The sinew and the forehand of our host,
> Having his ear full of his airy fame,
> Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent
> Lies mocking our designs.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 142-46

Achilles was certainly the foremost hero on the Greek side and in the *Iliad* he is by no means treated as a conceited fop. Before the poem opens, he has been the mainstay of the army; his expeditions have subdued the Trojan dominions in Asia Minor; he has fought harder than anyone.

It is only when Agamemnon tries to take away his lawful prize, the girl Briseis, and scorns him before the gathered army, that Achilles loses his temper and withdraws from the fight. He proves himself to be vengeful and cruel thereafter, but at least he has a reasonable cause for his anger.

In Roman and medieval times, however, the legend of the Roman descent from Aeneas swung popular opinion heavily in favor of the Trojans. Achilles was therefore downgraded and there seemed nothing wrong in having him sulk in his tent out of vainglorious conceit, rather than in righteous wrath. Furthermore, the proponents of courtly love did not fail to make use of later myths concerning Achilles' love for a Trojan princess. That will appear later in the play as a cause for his malingering.

… With him Patroclus

Nor is Achilles alone. He has a friend:

> With him Patroclus
> Upon a lazy bed the livelong day
> Breaks scurril jests,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 146-48

Patroclus is one of the important characters in the *Iliad* and is pictured there as the bosom friend of Achilles. Homer makes nothing of the relationship beyond that of loving friendship, but the later Greeks casually assumed more. They saw nothing wrong in homosexuality and even felt it to be a superior form of love. Consequently they had no hesitation in seeing Achilles and Patroclus as lovers in the literal sense of the word. This did not prevent Patroclus from being portrayed as a noble character (indeed, the gentlest of the Greeks) and a brave warrior.

In Christian Europe, however, homosexuality was an abomination and the Greek outlook could not be retained on its own terms. Shakespeare is forced to present Patroclus as effeminate, though he does not deprive him of all our sympathy either.

> … roaring Typhon …

Ulysses is offended at the fact that Patroclus mimics the Greek leaders for Achilles' amusement. Vehemently, Ulysses insists that the imitations are poor ones, though he does not hesitate to describe them with a realism that must surely be sufficient to embarrass the ones being imitated.

He describes Patroclus pretending to be Agamemnon, for instance, with an affectation of great self-importance and melodramatic language (undoubtedly not too much an exaggeration of the way Agamemnon should be played). The language Patroclus uses, says Ulysses indignantly, is so ridiculously exaggerated that:

> … from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropped,
> Would seem hyperboles.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 160-61

Typhon, in the Greek myths, was the largest monster ever born. His arms were a hundred miles long, his legs were serpents, his eyes flashed fire, and his mouth spewed forth flaming rocks. He may have been a personification of a volcano or, possibly, of a hurricane.

The gods themselves fled in terror before him and he was even able to capture Jupiter and for a while incapacitate him. Typhon was, however, eventually defeated and buried under Mount Etna, the largest and most fearsome volcano known to the ancient world.

Whether volcano or hurricane, it is clear that Typhon had a roaring voice, and that is the point of the metaphor.

> … Vulcan and his wife

Ulysses next describes Patroclus imitating Nestor getting ready to speak, or to answer a night alarm, meticulously demonstrating how he acts the old, old man (again presumably very much the way Nestor is really acted). And Ulysses says indignantly:

> That's done, as near as the extremest ends
> Of parallels, as like as Vulcan and his wife,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 167-68

Since parallels never meet, they can be extended infinitely in either direction. The imitation is as far from reality, Ulysses' words are saying, as is an infinite distance in one direction from an infinite distance in the other. The other comparison of opposites is Vulcan (Hephaestus) and his wife, Venus (see page I-11).

> He hath a lady. ..

Ulysses does not go on to say that Patroclus imitates Ulysses as well, but one can easily imagine he does and that that is what really annoys the Ithacan.

But further discussion is interrupted by a messenger who arrives from Troy. It is Aeneas, debonair and gay, bringing a challenge from Hector, offering single combat with any Greek. As a cause for combat, he sends a message which Aeneas delivers as:

> He hath a lady wiser, fairer, truer,
> Than ever Greek did compass in his arms;

—Act I, scene iii, lines 275-76

This is straight out of the medieval tales, when knights were supposed to fight in the names of their ladies in accord with the rules of courtly love (see page I-54). Agamemnon rises to the occasion, following the silly conventions on his own account, saying:

> This shall be told our lovers, Lord Aeneas;
> If none of them have soul in such a kind,
> We left them all at home. But we are soldiers;
> And may that soldier a mere recreant prove,
> That means not, hath not, or is not in love!

—Act I, scene iii, lines 284-88

It is hard to believe that such lines can be read seriously in surroundings that even hint at the grandeur with which Homer surrounded the Trojan War.

> … the great Myrmidon

Agamemnon leads Aeneas off to carry the challenge to the various tents, but it is clear that it is meant for Achilles.

When he is gone, Ulysses huddles with Nestor. Ulysses has an idea-Why send Achilles against Hector? Suppose by some accident Achilles is wounded. With Achilles known to be their best man, that would be disastrous.

If, on the other hand, someone other than Achilles is sent, and loses, it will still be taken for granted that Achilles would have won if he had fought. On the other hand, if the lesser man should win, not only would that be a terrific gain for the Greeks, but Achilles himself, suddenly finding himself in second place behind a new champion, would leave off his posturing and laziness and would buckle down to the serious business of fighting. Ulysses' advice is that they:

> … make a lott'ry;
> And by device let blockish Ajax draw
> The sort to fight with Hector; among ourselves
> Give him allowance for the better man,

For that will physic the great Myrmidon
Who broils in loud applause, and make him fall
His crest that prouder than blue Iris bends.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 373-79

At the start of Book Seven of the *Iliad,* Hector *does* challenge the Greek champions, though not with a silly make-believe excuse involving courtly love. Several Greek champions did accept the challenge, lots were drawn, and the choice *did* fall on Ajax, though Homer makes no mention of any device to do so.

As for the Myrmidons, they were a tribe in Phthia in southern Thessaly over whom Achilles ruled, hence the reference to him as "the great Myrmidon." The word seems to contain the Greek *myrmex,* meaning "ant," and the ancient mythmakers invented an explanation for this.

Aeacus, the grandfather of Achilles, ruled the small island of Aegina near Athens. Either it was not populated to begin with or its population was destroyed by a plague. In either case, Aeacus prayed to Zeus that he be given men to rule and in response the god converted the ants on the island into men. These Myrmidons followed Aeacus' son, Peleus, to Thessaly and from there a contingent went with Peleus' son, Achilles, to the Trojan War.

Iris is usually the personification of the rainbow (see page I-67), but here she is used to represent the sky generally.

I.. as Cerberus

Now we are ready to have our first glimpse of Ajax and Thersites. A proclamation has been posted concerning Hector's challenge and Ajax wants to know what it says. Since Ajax is illiterate, he must ask Thersites to read it for him and Thersites is not in an obliging mood. (He never is.)

Thersites scolds Ajax most viciously and eloquently and Ajax, who can speak only with his fists, uses those as arguments. Thersites strikes back (with words) where he knows it will hurt most, saying:

Thou grumblest and railest every hour on Achilles, and thou art as full of envy at his greatness as Cerberus is at Proser pina's beauty…

—Act II, scene i, lines 33-35

Cerberus is the ugly, slavering, three-headed dog that guards the gateway to the underground abode of the dead, serving to prevent any living from invading those regions and any of the dead from escaping. Proserpina, on the other hand, is the beautiful queen of the underworld, the daughter of Ceres, whom Hades had carried off (see page I-7).

… Achilles' brach …

Achilles and Patroclus come on the scene and prevent Ajax from striking Thersites further. Achilles is clearly amused at Thersites and encourages him to continue his scurrilous comments concerning Ajax, to the latter's huge annoyance. Nor does Thersites spare Achilles himself, and when the gentle Patroclus tries to quiet the lowborn railer, Thersites says, sarcastically:

/ will hold my peace when Achilles'
brach bids me, shall I?

—Act II, scene i, lines 119-20

"Brach" is an archaic word for a bitch and Patroclus is thus compared with a female animal. This is one of the few explicit and contemptuous references to homosexuality to be found in Shakespeare.

Thersites then departs, leaving Achilles to read the news of Hector's challenge to Ajax (pretending to care little about the matter for himself).

… Let Helen go

In the *Iliad,* the duel between Ajax and Hector takes up a good portion of Book Seven. It ends with both champions alive but with Hector having had clearly the worst of it. (This is reflected in the earlier statement in *Troilus and Cressida* that Ajax had beaten Hector down on one occasion, see page I-87.)

At the end of the duel, therefore, it is reasonable that the disheartened Trojans hold a conference and consider whether or not

to offer to give up Helen, pay an indemnity, and buy off the Greeks. Antenor counsels this line of action, but Paris insists he will not give up Helen, and when the offer of an indemnity without Helen is made, the Greeks (heartened by Ajax's showing) refuse, so the war goes on.

Shakespeare changes this. Hector's challenge has been issued and it has not yet been taken up, yet the Trojans are now seen in council trying to reach an important decision. Nestor, on behalf of the Greeks, has offered to end the war if the Trojans surrender Helen and pay an indemnity. It seems unreasonable to suppose that the Greeks would make such an offer or the Trojans consider one while the issue of the duel remained in doubt.

Yet the council proceedings are presented. In Shakespeare, it is Hector who makes the plea for a peace even at the price of a virtual surrender, saying in part:

> … modest doubt is called
> The beacon of the wise, the tent that searches
> To the bottom of the worst. Let Helen go.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 15-17

This is in character for Shakespeare's Hector and for Homer's Hector too. In the *Iliad* Hector is never pictured as a fire-eater for the sake of battle. He is pictured as knowing well that Troy is in the wrong and that Paris' abduction is indefensible, but he fights because Troy is his city. He is a fighter in a poor cause, but his own character enforces respect nevertheless.

> … for an old aunt…

Paris argues the hawkish view in the *Iliad,* but it is Troilus who speaks first here. He points out that it was the Trojans who first suffered loss at the hands of the Greeks and that the abduction of Helen was but a retaliation that all the Trojans favored at the time it was carried through. He goes on to describe Paris' retaliation:

> And for an old aunt whom the Greeks held captive
> He brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness
> Wrinkles Apollo's and makes pale the morning.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 77-79

The "old aunt" is Hesione, a sister of King Priam. When Hercules captured and sacked Troy, he carried off Hesione into captivity. She was never returned despite Trojan demands.

The capture of Hesione plays no part in the Homeric tale, and the abduction of Helen could, in any case, never be viewed as a fair return for an earlier outrage. Hesione was captured as a war prisoner, and however deplorable we consider such things now, this was considered legitimate in ancient times. Paris, on the other hand, had taken Helen not as the spoils of war, but by treachery and at the cost of violating what was due his host, Menelaus, who was entertaining him with all hospitality. The two actions simply weren't comparable.

The tale of Hesione has another point of impingement on the tale of Troy. She was awarded to Telamon, the brother of Peleus. By her, Tela-mon had a son named Teucer, who is therefore first cousin to Achilles. Teucer does not appear in *Troilus and Cressida* but he does appear in the *Iliad* as a skilled archer.

Telamon, by a previous wife (an Athenian woman), had another son, who was none other than Ajax. Ajax is therefore first cousin to Achilles and half brother to Teucer. In the *Iliad* Teucer is always fighting at the side of Ajax and the two half brothers are devoted to each other.

Teucer, notice, is half Trojan through his mother and is actually a nephew of Priam and a first cousin to Hector, Troilus, Paris, and the rest, as well as to Achilles. At the beginning of the play, when Ajax is first mentioned to Cressida, he is described as "a lord of Troyan blood, nephew to Hector," which he isn't. The confusion is with Teucer, who is a lord of Trojan blood, cousin to Hector.

> Our firebrand brother …

The council is interrupted by Cassandra, Priam's mad daughter, whose prophecies are always true, but never believed. She wails:

> Cry, Troyans, cry! Practice your eyes with tears!
> Troy must not be, nor goodly Ilion stand;
> Our firebrand brother, Paris, burns us all.

-Act II, scene ii, lines 108-10

Just before Paris was born (according to legends that play no part

in the *Iliad)* Hecuba dreamed she was delivered of a burning firebrand. A soothsayer, when consulted, said that this meant that Troy would be burned and destroyed because of the child about to be born. He urged that the child be killed as soon as born.

Priam, unable to bring himself to do the job or witness its being done, had a herdsman take the child, instructing him to kill it The herdsman could not do it either, but exposed the child in an uninhabited place. There it was found by a she-bear, which suckled it.

The herdsman, finding the child alive when he returned after some days, decided to bring it up as his own son, and it was while the young man was engaged in herding that the three goddesses Juno, Minerva, and Venus came down to have him decide which was the most beautiful.

After this, Paris, still in his role as herdsman, entered certain games being held in Troy, did marvelously well, even against Hector, and was recognized by Cassandra as the long-lost Paris. There was no thought of killing him; he was restored to his royal position and, eventually, proved his title to the firebrand dream by sailing to Sparta and abducting Helen.

> … whom Aristotle …

Hector refers to Cassandra's cries as proof that Helen ought to be returned and the war ended, but Cassandra is simply dismissed as mad by Troilus. Paris rises and places himself on Troilus' side.

Hector is not convinced. He says his two younger brothers argue:

> … but superficially: not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 165-67

This is, actually, one of the most amusing anachronisms in Shakespeare. The dramatist forgets, for the moment, that he is discussing a war that took place in 1200 b.c., and has Hector refer to a philosopher who died in 322 b.c.-rune centuries later.

And yet, although Hector denigrates the arguments of Troilus and Paris, he cannot manage to stand against the kind of arguments that refer to such abstractions as honor, glory, and patriotism. It is decided (as in the *Iliad) to* keep Helen and let the war go on.

… thy caduceus…

The scene shifts back to the Greek camp, where Thersites, standing outside Achilles' tent, is brooding over his recent beating by Ajax. He inveighs against the stupidity of both heroes, Achilles as well as Ajax, and invokes the vengeance of the gods upon them, saying:

> O thou great thunder-darter of Olympus,
> forget that thou art Jove, the king of gods;
> and, Mercury, lose all the serpentine craft of thy caduceus,
> if ye take not that little, little,
> less than little wit from them that they have;

—Act II, scene iii, lines 10-14

Jupiter (Zeus) was, in all likelihood, a storm god originally. His home would naturally be on a mountaintop where the clouds gather. Olympus was the one chosen by the Greeks, and it was a logical choice, for it is the highest mountain in Greece-although not so terribly high at that, only 1.8 miles. It is located in northern Thessaly, about 170 miles northwest of Athens.

As a storm god, Jupiter would naturally be in charge of the lightning. He would therefore be a thunder-darter, or, more correctly, a thunderbolt-darter.

Mercury (Hermes) was, in many myths, the messenger of the gods, a kind of male version of Iris (see page I-67). It is because of Mercury's swiftness in fulfilling his errands that he is usually pictured with small wings on his sandals and hat.

In carrying the messages of Jupiter, he was acting as Jupiter's herald or substitute and therefore carried with him the aura of Jupiter's majesty. In token of that he carried a staff, as earthly heralds did. In earliest times, the staff may have had flexible twigs at the end which would be wound back over the body of the staff.

In later times, these twigs, shown in representations of Mercury and misunderstood, became serpents. It is this serpent-bound staff, called the caduceus, which became a characteristic mark of Mercury. The caduceus was further confused in still later times with a magical wand, the agent by which Mercury, at the behest of Jupiter, brought about supernatural effects. Thersites therefore speaks of the "craft of thy caduceus."

… the Neapolitan bone-ache.. .

Having wished evil on Ajax and Achilles specifically, Thersites goes on to curse the Greeks generally:

> After this, the vengeance on the whole camp!
> Or, rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache, for that,
> methinks, is the curse depending on those that war for a placket.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 18-21

The "Neapolitan bone-ache" is syphilis. This was not recognized as a serious, contagious disease until the early sixteenth century. Indeed, the story arose that it first appeared in Italy during battles at which some of Columbus' sailors were present. It therefore seemed that those sailors had picked up syphilis in the New World from the Indians and brought it back to Europe. (Europe sent the Indians smallpox in return.)

This may not be so and the disease may have occurred in Europe earlier, and been considered one of the forms of leprosy, perhaps; but if so, syphilis occurred less frequently then and less virulently. If the sixteenth century did not find it a new disease, it found it at least a more serious version of an old one, and it still required a new name.

This was difficult to find, for it was early recognized that contagion most easily resulted through sexual intercourse, so that it became shameful to admit the disease or even discuss it. It was natural for any group to consider it characteristic of a neighboring group. The French, for instance, would call it the "Neapolitan bone-ache," while the Italians would call it the "French disease."

In 1530 an Italian physician, Girolamo Fracastoro, wrote a Lathi epic poem which was a mock myth about a shepherd who offended Apollo and who fell victim to what Fracastoro called the "French disease." The shepherd's name was the Greek-sounding one (but not real Greek) of Syphilis, and it is this which gave the present name to the disease.

In Shakespeare's time the disease was still less than a century old in European consciousness. It had the doubtful virtue of novelty and of being associated with sex. Any reference to it, then, was good for a laugh, especially if it was arranged to have the laugh at the expense of foreigners. Thersites not only affixes it to the Neapolitans (making the reference doubly anachronistic, since Naples was not to be founded till some five centuries after the Trojan War) but makes use of the sexual

angle as well by insisting it is to be what is expected for any army that wars for a placket (a petticoat, and therefore a coarse term for a woman).

References to syphilis abound in Shakespeare, usually at the expense of the French, but since moderns don't find the subject as humorous as the Elizabethans did, I shall pick up such references as infrequently as I can.

… a privileged man …

Thersites assumes, in this scene, a totally un-Homeric role. He is a jester; a man of quick wit (or perhaps slightly addled brains) whose remarks and responses are a source of amusement. He had apparently fulfilled that function for Ajax but Ajax had beaten him and he was now seeking employment with Achilles instead.

In return for amusing his master (in days when amusement was not yet electronified and easy to come by at the flick of a dial) a jester was allowed extraordinary leeway in his mockery and much more freedom of speech than anyone else might have. Naturally, this worked best when the jester's patron was powerful and could suppress the hurt feelings of underlings who might otherwise break the jester's neck.

Thus, when Thersites begins to perform for Achilles, Patroclus reacts with the beginnings of violence to one of Thersites' scurrilous remarks and Achilles restrains him by saying:

He is a privileged man. Proceed, Thersites.

-Act II, scene iii, line 59

Such a jester was often called a "fool" and many a Shakespearean play has someone listed as "Fool" in the cast of characters. This was not necessarily because they were foolish, but because very often they hid their sharp satire behind oblique comments in such a way that the points were not immediately apparent and therefore seemed foolish to the dull-witted. It also helped keep the jester from broken bones if he played the fool so that those he mocked might not be certain whether his remarks were deliberately hurtful or whether they were perhaps just the aimless maunderings of a lackwit.

Thersites is given this name a little later in the scene when Ajax is inveighing against Achilles and Nestor is surprised at the spleen of those remarks. Ulysses explains:

Achilles hath inveigled his fool from him.

—Act II, scene iii, line 93

… and a cuckold…

Thersites' bitter jesting for the benefit of Achilles, and largely at the expense of Patroclus, is interrupted by the arrival of a deputation from the Greeks. Achilles promptly retires into the tent, unwilling to talk to them, and before leaving himself, Thersites expresses his opinion of both sides of this inter-Greek friction:

Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery.
All the argument is a whore and a cuckold…

—Act II, scene iii, lines 73-75

The whore is Helen, of course, and the cuckold (that is, the deceived husband) is Menelaus.

Why cuckold? The word is a form of "cuckoo." The common European species of cuckoo lays its egg in the nest of another and smaller bird, leaving to the foster parents the task of rearing the cuckoo fledgling. The male adulterer also lays his egg in the nest of another, to use the ribald analogy that must have occurred as long ago as Roman times, for the Romans called an adulterer a "cuckoo." The word shifted to "cuckold" and the name passed from the adulterer to the adulterer's victim. The name, or any guarded reference to it, was as sure-fire a source of laughter in Elizabethan times as any remark concerning horns (see page I-84).

… rely on none

The deputation of Greeks who have arrived at Achilles' tent intend to urge him to fight more vigorously.

This parallels, in a way, Book Nine of the *Iliad,* where the Greeks, having had some trouble in an immediately preceding battle, gloomily anticipate more and decide to try to win over Achilles once again.

A deputation of three, Ajax, Ulysses and Phoenix (the last an old tutor of Achilles), are sent. They offer to return the girl Agamemnon

took from Achilles, together with additional rich gifts as compensation for Achilles' humiliation. By now, however, Achilles has so consumed himself with anger that he prefers his grievance to all else and he absolutely refuses.

In the *Iliad* Achilles puts himself in the wrong at this point, so that in the end he will have to suffer too, as well as Agamemnon and his Greek army. But if Achilles puts himself in the wrong, he does it at least in a grand fashion.

In *Troilus and Cressida* Achilles can offer nothing but petulance. Ulysses enters the tent and emerges to say that Achilles will not fight. When Agamemnon asks the reason, Ulysses replies:

> He doth rely on none,
>
> —Act II, scene iii, line 165

This is mere sulkiness, or, as it turns out later, lovesickness and treason, which is even worse. Shakespeare thus continues his Trojan-biased downgrading of the Homeric picture of the great Greek hero.

> … more coals to Cancer…

It is time for the Greeks to make do without Achilles as best they can, obviously, and they begin to flatter Ajax into accepting the duel with Hector.

Thus, when Agamemnon suggests that Ajax be sent into the tent to plead with Achilles, Ulysses demurs grandiloquently and says that Achilles is not worth so great an honor as having a man like Ajax demur to him:

> That were to enlard his fat-already pride,
> And add more coals to Cancer when he burns
> With entertaining great Hyperion.
>
> —Act II, scene iii, lines 197-99

Hyperion (the sun, see page I-11) makes a complete round of the sky against the background of the stars in the course of one year. The stars in its path are divided into twelve constellations, which, all together, make up the Zodiac. (This is from a Greek phrase meaning

"circle of animals" because so many of the constellations are visualized as animals.)

On June 21 the sun enters the sign of Cancer (the Crab) and summer starts on that day. Ulysses refers to summer heat in the notion of Cancer burning because of the entry of great Hyperion. Ajax kowtowing to Achilles would but make summer heat hotter; that is, it would make proud Achilles prouder.

> Bull-bearing Milo. ..

The flattery grows grosser and grosser and Ajax, delighted, accepts it all. Ulysses says, in praise of Ajax:

> … for thy vigor,
> Bull-bearing Milo his addition yield
> To sinewy Ajax.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 247-49

Milo was an athlete of Croton, a city on the coast of the Italian toe, whose feats of strength had grown legendary. The most famous tale was that he lifted a particular calf onto his shoulders every day. It grew heavier with age, of course, and finally Milo was lifting a full-grown bull. This was the reason for his addition (that is, tide) of "Bull-bearing," a title which, Ulysses was saying, he would now have to yield to Ajax.

This is another anachronism, of course, almost as bad as the one about Aristotle. Milo was not a myth but an actual historical figure (though the stories about him might be exaggerated, to be sure). He died about 500 b.c., seven centuries after the Trojan War.

> Fresh kings…

Ajax is now thoroughly softened up and has played the scene as an utter puppet in the hands of Ulysses. This is completely unclassical, for Ajax is a truly heroic figure in the *Iliad* and was viewed as a sympathetic and tragic figure in later tales. Partly this was because he was considered an Athenian, for he was from the small island of Salamis, which, in the century when the *Iliad* was edited into its final form, had just been annexed by Athens.

Yet there is an echo of the classic too. After Achilles' death there

was a competition for his armor, which narrowed down to Ulysses and Ajax. Ulysses won out and Ajax, in grief and shame, went mad. Ajax, it would seem, in one way or another, is always at the mercy of Ulysses.

This part of the task done, Ulysses now suggests that Agamemnon call a council of war, at which the arrangement to put up Ajax against Hector be completed. He says:

> Please it our great general
> To call together all his state of war;
> Fresh kings are come to Troy.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 260-62

It would not have been reasonable to suppose that the city of Troy, all by itself, could have withstood a huge expeditionary force of a united Greece. Rather, it stood at the head of a large combination of forces itself. The tribes of Asia Minor stood with it and one of the most prominent Trojan heroes in the *Iliad* was Sarpedon, a prince of Lycia in southwestern Asia Minor, some three hundred miles south of Troy. He does not appear in *Troilus and Cressida,* but Pandarus, who does, is also a Lycian-at least in the *Iliad.*

In Book Ten of the *Iliad,* immediately after the unsuccessful deputation to Achilles, there is, indeed, the tale of a new reinforcement of the Trojans. This is Rhesus, a Thracian king who has led both men and horses to the aid of the Trojans. Thrace is in Europe, to be sure, but it lies to the northeast of Greece and was inhabited by non-Greeks. (Nor did it ever become Greek in the future. It is the region that makes up the modern kingdom of Bulgaria.)

In the *Iliad* Ulysses and Diomedes sneak into the Trojan camp under the cover of night and assassinate Rhesus, nullifying the effect of his reinforcement, but nothing of the sort takes place in *Troilus and Cressida.* The reference to fresh kings coming to Troy is all that is left.

> O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid

As Act Three opens, Pandarus has finally made arrangements to bring Troilus and Cressida together for a night and has come to Priam's palace to persuade Paris to cover for Troilus, so that no one may suspect where the young prince is.

This gives Shakespeare a chance to place Helen herself on stage-in one scene only.

In the *Iliad* Helen's beauty is made overwhelming. All are victims of it and all are affected by it. Homer places her praise, with exceeding effectiveness, in the mouths of the old men of Troy, showing that even impotent age feels the influence. He says:

"At Helen's approach, these grey-beards muttered earnestly among themselves. 'How entrancing she is! Like an immortal goddess! Yes, marvellously like one! I cannot blame the Trojans and Greeks for battling over her so bitterly!'"

And Helen is her own victim too. She is conscious of herself as the cause of immense misery; she is contrite and ashamed, and, in the same scene referred to above, she says to Priam:

" 'I ought to have died before eloping with Prince Paris-imagine, leaving my home, my family, my unmarried daughter, and so many women friends of my own age! But leave them I did, and now I weep for remorse… Oh, I am a shameless bitch, if ever there was one.'"

Furthermore, Helen is intelligent and in the *Odyssey,* when, ten years after the fall of Troy, she is once again the wife of Menelaus and the two are entertaining the son of Ulysses in their home, Helen is clearly more quick-witted than her husband.

But how does Shakespeare present Helen in the one scene in which she appears? She appears as a vain, silly woman, with an empty head, unaware of (or uncaring about) what she has caused, and incapable, apparently, of making an intelligent remark.

Helen scarcely allows Pandarus the chance to make his arrangements with Paris and insists he sing for her, saying:

> Let thy song be love.
> This love will undo us all
> O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!

—Act III, scene i, lines 111-12

Cupid (Eros) is the god of love (see page 1-19).

This is Helen as viewed through the eyes of courtly love. By the convention of the troubadours, a woman need not deserve love, she need merely be a woman.

> … be thou my Charon

The arrangements with Paris are made and Pandarus hurries back to bring Troilus and Cressida together. Troilus is waiting for him in a fever of impatience, and says:

I stalk about her door
Like a strange soul upon the Stygian banks
Staying for waftage. O, be thou my Charon,
And give me swift transportance to those fields
Where I may wallow in the lily beds
Proposed for the deserver.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 7-12

The Stygian banks are those that border the river Styx, which, according to the Greek myths, flows about Hades, separating it from the abode of mortal men. The spirits of dead men must wait upon those banks until a ferry, under the guidance of an underworld deity called Charon (see page I-68) ferried him across.

It is not to Hades itself that Troilus demands passage, of course, but to the Elysian Fields (see page I-13) where he can "wallow in the lily beds."

"As false as Cressid"

The lovers meet, with Pandarus licking his chops lecherously and doing everything but forcing them into embrace. The two young people make eloquent speeches to each other, protesting their love. Troilus swears his constancy, adding a new simile to the common comparisons for truth:

"As true as Troilus" shall crown up the verse
And sanctify the numbers.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 183-84

Cressida, similarly, makes up a series of similes for falseness, adding a new and climactic one, in case she should ever be unfaithful:

Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
"As false as Cressid."

—Act III, scene ii, lines 196-97

Pandarus too chimes in:

> / have taken such pains to bring you together,
> let all pitiful goers-between be called to the world's end
> after my name; call them all Pandars.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 201-3

All these wishes came true, as Shakespeare knew they would, for they were already current in his time, thanks to Chaucer's earlier tale. And, indeed, goers-between are still called Pandars (panders) to this day.

> Let Diomedes.. .

But the young lovers have no sooner met and consummated their passion than the clouds begin to gather. In the Greek camp, remember, is Calchas, the renegade Trojan (the analogue of Chryses in the *Iliad).*

His services have been such that Agamemnon has always been willing to ask the Trojans to surrender Cressida in return for some Trojan who might be prisoner of the Greeks. They have always refused. But now the Greeks have captured Antenor and he is so important to the Trojans, says Calchas, that they will surely give up Cressida to have him back.

It is curious how this reverses the situation in the *Iliad.* In the *Iliad* Chryses the priest asks Agamemnon to return his daughter, Chryseis, who is held in the Greek camp. In *Troilus and Cressida* Calchas the priest asks Agamemnon to obtain his daughter, Cressida, who is held in the Trojan camp. In the *Iliad* Agamemnon refuses the request; in *Troilus and Cressida* he agrees.

Agamemnon says:

> Let Diomedes bear him,
> And bring us Cressid hither; Calchas shall have
> What he requests of us.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 30-32

Diomedes is the son of Tydeus, who was one of the seven against Thebes (see page I-57). Diomedes and the sons of the other fallen leaders swore to avenge that defeat. They were called the Epigoni ("after-born") and succeeded where their fathers had failed-taking and sacking Thebes.

Not long after that, Diomedes and his friend Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus (see page I-58), joined the expedition to Troy, leading the men of Argos.

In the *Iliad,* Diomedes is one of the most effective of the Greek warriors, third only to Achilles and Ajax. Indeed, in Book Five Diomedes wreaks havoc among the Trojans and not even Hector can stand against him. It is only in post-Homeric times that his role in the Troilus-Cressida story was invented.

> … great Mars to faction

Diomedes is also taking the message to Hector that the Trojan's challenge has been accepted and that Ajax will fight with him.

With that done, Ulysses now tightens his net about Achilles. He suggests that the Greek princes pass the great hero by with slight regard, while he follows behind to explain to the startled Achilles that what is past is easily forgotten and that man's reputation depends on what he is doing, not on what he has done. It is Ajax who is now the darling of the army because he is going to fight Hector, and Achilles, who is doing nothing, is disregarded. Yet Achilles, he admits, is one

> Whose glorious deeds, but in these fields of late,
> Made emulous missions 'mongst the gods themselves
> And drave great Mars to faction.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 187-89

In the *Iliad* the gods themselves take sides in the fighting. Most active on the Greek side are Juno and Minerva (who lost out in the contest before Paris) and Neptune (who had once built walls for Troy and then been defrauded of his pay). Most active on the Trojan side are Venus (who won the contest before Paris), her loving Mars, and Apollo (who had also been defrauded in the matter of the walls, but apparently didn't care).

At one point Mars actually joined in the spearing and killing as though he were human, until Diomedes, guided by Minerva, wounded him and drove him from the field.

The gods do not appear in *Troilus and Cressida,* and their fighting leaves behind but this one reference by Ulysses.

> … one of Priam's daughters

Achilles says brusquely that he has his reasons for remaining out of the fight, whereupon Ulysses explains, dryly, that the reasons are not private:

> 'Tis known, Achilles, that you are in love
> With one of Priam's daughters.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 192-93

The daughter in question is Polyxena. She does not appear in the *Iliad,* but later poets, anxious to add love and romance to Homer's austere tale, supplied her. Achilles was supposed to have fallen in love with her and to have been ready to betray the Greeks for her sake. Others write, variously, that she was indeed married to him eventually and that it was at the marriage rites that Achilles was slain by Paris (with Polyxena's treacherous help, according to some). Other versions are that she killed herself after he died, or was sacrificed at his burial rites.

> .. .Pluto'sgold

Achilles writhes in embarrassment, but Ulysses says calmly that it is not at all surprising that his secret is known:

> The providence that's in a watchful state
> Knows almost every grain of Pluto's gold

—Act III, scene iii, lines 196-97

Pluto, as the god of the underworld, was naturally related to gold and to other forms of mineral wealth found in the ground. It was an easy transition to imagine Pluto to be the god of wealth. Actually, the personification of wealth was given the name "Plutus," a close variant of "Pluto."

In later myths Plutus was imagined to be the son of Ceres

(Demeter). She is the harvest goddess and the reference to wealth in the grounds can refer to the richly growing gram as well as to the minerals. But then, Pluto (Hades) was the son-in-law of the same goddess, since it was he who carried off Proserpina, Ceres' daughter.

To be pedantically correct, one should speak only of Plutus in connection with wealth, but the mistake is a small one.

… young Pyrrhus. ..

Ulysses further turns the knife in the wound:

> But it must grieve young Pyrrhus now at home,
> When fame shall in our islands sound her trump,
> And all the Greekish girls shall tripping sing,
> "Great Hector's sister did Achilles win,
> But our great Ajax bravely beat down him."

—Act III, scene iii, lines 209-13

Pyrrhus (also known as Neoptolemus) is Achilles' son, and his birth came about as follows.

Before the expedition to Troy began, Thetis had hidden her young son Achilles on the island of Scyrus, for she knew that if he went to Troy he would win deathless fame but die young. She preferred to have him live a quiet but long life. She had him disguised as a maiden at the court of the Scyran ruler.

The Greeks came searching for him in response to Calchas' warning that they could not take Troy without Achilles. Ulysses cleverly discovered which maiden was Achilles by presenting a display of jewels and finery, among which a sword was hidden. Where the real girls snatched at the jewels, Achilles seized the sword.

Apparently, Achilles also revealed himself to the other maidens in such a fashion as to father a son on one of them. That son, Pyrrhus, remained in Scyrus while Achilles was at Troy.

The accretion of myths and elaborate tales about the central pillar of Homer's story has made hash of the chronology of the affair.

For instance, it is at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis that the Apple of Discord is flung among the guests, and it is immediately afterward that Paris, still a herdsman, must choose among the goddesses. Paris must be a teen-ager at the time and Achilles is not yet born, so Paris must be at least fifteen years older than Achilles.

Eventually, Paris abducts Helen and the Trojan War starts. Now

Achilles is old enough to go to war. Let us say he is fifteen at the start of the war and has already left a girl with child. By the time of the last year of the war, in which both the *Iliad* and *Troilus and Cressida* are set, Achilles is twenty-four and Paris is thirty-nine. Since Hector is the oldest son of Priam, he must be in his late forties at least.

This is bearable, perhaps, but now consider that Pyrrhus, at Achilles' death in the last year of the war, can scarcely be much more than ten years old. Yet according to the later legends, he is brought to Troy and fights with surpassing bravery in the final battles, to say nothing of being one of the crudest of the sackers at the end (see page I-209).

Such things did not bother those who listened to the tales, of course, and they don't really bother us, either, since the value of those tales does not depend on such mundane matters as precise chronology. However, it is a curiosity and so I mention it.

> A valiant Greek …

Achilles is left shaken after Ulysses departs and Patroclus urges his great friend to return to the wars. (This Patroclus also does in the *Iliad.)* But Achilles cannot yet bring himself to do this. He suggests only that Ajax, after the combat, invite Hector and the other Trojan leaders to visit him under a flag of truce.

Meanwhile, Diomedes has brought Antenor to Troy. He is greeted by Paris and Aeneas and Paris says:

> A valiant Greek, Aeneas; take his hand.
> Witness the process of your speech, wherein
> You told how Diomed, a whole week by days,
> Did haunt you in the field.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 7-10

This reflects a passage in the *Iliad,* but one that is considerably softened in Aeneas' favor. In Book Five of the *Iliad,* the one dominated by the feats of Diomedes, Aeneas and Diomedes meet in the field and the latter has much the better of it. With a great boulder, Diomedes strikes down Aeneas and would surely have killed him except that first Venus and then Apollo swooped down to save him.

> … Anchises' life

Aeneas is all chivalrous graciousness, in the best tradition of medieval gallantry, and says:

> Now, by Anchises' life,
> Welcome indeed!

—Act IV, scene i, lines 21-22

Anchises is Aeneas' father. Venus fell in love with the handsome young Anchises and had Aeneas by him. She made Anchises promise, however, that he would never reveal the fact that he was the goddess' lover. Incautiously, Anchises let out the secret and was in consequence paralyzed, blinded, or killed (depending on which version of the story you read).

Anchises was far better known to Shakespeare's audience than one might expect from the Greek myths alone. He is the subject of a dramatic story in Vergil's *Aeneid.* The aged Anchises cannot walk (this fits in with the suggestion that he was paralyzed because of his indiscretion concerning Venus) and was therefore helpless at the time of the sack and destruction of Troy. Aeneas, therefore, bore him out of the burning city on his back, thus setting a greatly admired example of filial love, a love that is reflected backward by having Aeneas swear by his father's life.

> By Venus' hand …

Aeneas goes on to combine hospitality and martial threat in courtly manner:

> By Venus' hand 1 swear,
> No man alive can love in such a sort
> The thing he means to kill
> more excellently.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 22-24

The mention of Venus' hand makes sense in light of the events in Book Five of the *Iliad.* When Aeneas lies felled by Diomedes' boulder, sure to be killed if the gods did not intervene, Venus (Aeneas' mother) flew down from Olympus to save him. The furious Diomedes cast his

spear even at the goddess and wounded her in the hand. She fled, screaming, and it was only when the much more powerful Apollo took her place that Diomedes was forced to retire. Thus, Aeneas was swearing by that part of his mother which had been hurt on his behalf.

… Some say the Genius

On the very morning after their night together, the news comes to Troilus that he must give up Cressida and send her to the Greek camp.

Brokenhearted, Troilus and Cressida vow eternal fidelity. Troilus gives Cressida a sleeve (an arm cover which in medieval times was a separate article of clothing, not sewn to shirt or robe) and Cressida returns a glove.

The deputation waits outside for Cressida to be turned over to them, and when Aeneas calls out impatiently, Troilus says:

> Hark! You are called. Some say the Genius
> Cries so to him that instantly must die.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 50-51

To the Romans, every man had a personal spirit (the equivalent of what we would call a guardian angel) which they called a "Genius." Every woman, similarly, had her "Juno," and Genius may be a masculine form of Juno. To this day, we speak of a man who is supremely gifted as a "genius," though we forget that by this we mean that the divine spirit is speaking through him with particular effectiveness.

Hosts of superstitions naturally arose concerning these Geniuses. It would warn the person it guarded of imminent death, for instance, as Troilus says here.

> Fie, fie upon her

Cressida is brought to the Greek camp, where she is suddenly a different person. She has been flirtatious and a little hypocritical with Troilus, teasing and a little ribald with Pandarus, but nothing so bad. In the Greek camp, however, she is suddenly a gay wanton, joking with the Greek leaders and eager to kiss them all-even Nestor.

Only the clear-eyed Ulysses refuses, insulting her openly, and saying to Nestor after she leaves:

> Fie, fie upon her!

There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip;
Nay, her foot speaks. Her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 54-57

Without warning, Cressida is pictured as an utterly worthless woman.

Why so sudden a change? Surely there must have been room to express Cressida's side of the matter in at least one speech. She is torn away from home, and from love at the very moment of that love's height, with only her father at her side, frightened, uncertain, weak. Chaucer, in his version, presents Cressida's dilemma far more sympathetically and lets us pity her in her fall. Shakespeare only lets us despise her.

Might we speculate that Shakespeare is being savage to Cressida and showing her in the worst possible fashion because he wishes to make a point outside the play?

The play seems to have been performed first in 1602, and Shakespeare may have been writing it in 1600-1. Is there a possibility, then, that Shakespeare was influenced by a dramatic event that took place in the time when he was writing the play?

Shakespeare's patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (see page I-3), with whom Shakespeare may have been on the closest possible terms, was himself a member of the faction of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex.

About the time that Shakespeare was beginning his career as a dramatist, Essex had become the favorite and lover of Queen Elizabeth I (who was thirty-three years older than he was).

Essex longed for a successful military career, though the sensible Queen saw that although he might be suitable for a lover, he was not suitable for a general. In 1596, however, he finally persuaded her to allow him to lead an expedition to Spain (with which England was still carrying on a desultory war, a war of which the defeat of the Armada in 1588 had been the high point). Southampton accompanied him on this expedition.

The expedition had a certain success, for the city of Cadiz was seized and sacked. Elizabeth I did not consider the results of the expedition to have been worth its expense, however-she was always a most careful lady with a shilling-and Essex did not receive the credit that he (and his faction, including Southampton and, presumably, Shakespeare) felt he deserved.

Essex, however, became more of a war hawk than ever, having tasted the delights of victory. In 1599 he talked the reluctant Elizabeth (who by now was beginning to feel he was becoming entirely too ambitious to be a safe subject) into letting him lead an expedition into Ireland to put down a rebellion there. Again Southampton left with him, but this time Elizabeth called him back, to his deep discomfiture.

The Essex faction had high hopes for the Irish adventure, and Shakespeare, writing *Henry V* while Essex was in Ireland, refers to the expedition most flatteringly *in* the chorus that precedes Act V of that play (see page II-508).

The expedition, however, proved a complete fiasco and Essex returned to England in absolute fury at what he, and his faction, believed to be the machinations of the anti-Essex group at the English court. It seemed to them that they had deliberately intrigued against Essex to prevent him from achieving military renown.

In desperation, Essex began to plot rebellion. Southampton arranged to have Shakespeare's play *Richard 11* revived. It dealt with the deposition of an English monarch (see page II-304) and Elizabeth did not miss the point. Both Southampton and Essex were arrested, tried for treason, and convicted in February 1601. Essex was, indeed, executed on February 25, but Southampton's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and, after Elizabeth's death in 1603, he was released.

It is tempting to think that Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida* under the deep shadow of the misfortunes of Essex and Southampton.

To him, the expedition against Troy may have seemed very much like Essex's expeditions against Cadiz and, later, against Ireland. These expeditions were fought for what seemed to Shakespeare, perhaps, to be a most ungrateful and worthless woman who was oblivious to the sufferings of her faithful servants and whom he may have envisioned as amusing herself with Essex's rival, Sir Walter Raleigh, while the faithful Essex was suffering in the field. Could this be why Shakespeare draws Helen as so contemptible (see page I-111)?

The factions that disrupted the Greek effort on the fields of Troy were magnified by Shakespeare, perhaps as a bitter satire on the factions at the English court that had, in the view of the Essex faction, stabbed Essex in the back.

And Cressida, of course, would then be another aspect of Elizabeth- that false woman who had betrayed her lover and sent him to the gallows. Could Shakespeare have been working on the fourth act just when the execution of Essex came to pass (with Southampton still in prison)? Could he have turned to his pen for revenge on Cressida, making no effort whatever to explain her or excuse her? Did he want her defection to be as bare and as disgraceful as possible so

that Ulysses' "Fie, fie upon her!" might reflect as strongly as possible upon the Queen?

> The youngest son…

At last we are ready for the duel between Hector and Ajax. Since Ajax is a relative of Hector's (here again is the confusion between Ajax and Teucer) it is agreed that the fight is not to be to the death.

While they prepare, Agamemnon asks the name of a sad Trojan on the other side. Ulysses answers:

> The youngest son of Priam, a true knight,
> Not yet mature, yet matchless …

—Act IV, scene v, lines 96-97

It is Troilus being described here, in the very highest terms. The praise has nothing directly to do with the play, and one cannot help but wonder if Shakespeare intends it to refer to the betrayed and executed Essex; if it is his epitaph for that rash person.

This is an example, by the way, of the curious way in which in *Troilus and Cressida* the combatants on either side don't seem to know each other until they are introduced, although they have presumably been fighting each other for years.

This is true in the *Iliad* as well. In Book Three of that poem, when Paris and Menelaus are getting ready for their duel, Priam and his councilors sit on the wall and view the Greek army. Helen is there too, and Priam has her identify several of the Greek champions: Agamemnon, Ulysses, Ajax. Surely after nine years of war Priam ought to know these people. Perhaps the war was much shorter in the earliest legends (and, for all we know, in truth) but grew longer to accommodate the numerous tales added to the primitive story by later poets-and perhaps Homer's tale was tailored to correspond, unavoidably leaving inconsistencies as a result.

> Not Neoptolemus …

The duel between Ajax and Hector is fought and ends in a draw and in a graceful speech by the chivalrous Hector, as does the similar duel in Book Seven of the *Iliad* (where, however, Hector clearly gets the worse of the exchanges).

Ajax, who is not very good at speaking, manages to express his disappointment at not having beaten Hector definitely.

To which Hector, rather vaingloriously, replies:

> Not Neoptolemus so mirable,
> On whose bright crest Fame with her loud'st "Oyes"
> Cries, "This is he!" could promise to himself
> A thought of added honor torn from Hector.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 141-44

The only Neoptolemus in the Greek myths was the son of Achilles (see page I-116), who was also known as Pyrrhus, meaning "ruddy," the latter possibly being a nickname. This is possibly an anachronism on Shakespeare's part, for Hector could scarcely be speaking of a boy who had not yet appeared in the war-or else it is Achilles who is being referred to rather than his son.

> / knew thy grandsire.. .

The Trojan leaders are then invited to the Greek camp under conditions of truce (as Achilles had asked, see page I-116). There they greet each other with careful courtesy, and old Nestor says to Hector:

> I knew thy grandsire,
> And once fought with him.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 195-96

Hector's grandfather was Laomedon, who built the walls of Troy. According to legend, he built them with the aid of Poseidon and Apollo, who were condemned to earthly labor by Zeus for their rebellion against him (which Thetis and Briareus thwarted, see page I-86). When the walls were complete, Laomedon refused the gods their pay and in revenge they sent a sea monster to ravage the Trojan coast.

The Trojans had to sacrifice maidens periodically to the monster, and eventually Laomedon's own daughter, Hesione, was exposed to him. She was rescued by Hercules. It was when Laomedon broke his word again and refused certain horses which he had promised in return for the rescue, that Hercules sacked the city and took Hesione

captive. He also killed Laomedon and all but one of his sons. The sole surviving son was Priam.

Nestor is not recorded as having fought with Laomedon (either for him or against him, in either meaning of the phrase). There is, however, an odd coincidence here. Hercules is also recorded as having made war against Neleus, Nestor's father, to have slain Neleus and all but one of his sons and to have placed the one survivor, Nestor, on the throne of Pylos. In this respect, Priam and Nestor had a good deal in common.

> … your Greekish embassy

Hector also greets Ulysses (who has cleverly cut off what promises to be a flood of Nestorian reminiscence) and says:

> Ah, sir, there's many a Greek and Troyan dead,
> Since first I saw yourself and Diomed
> In llion, on your Greekish embassy.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 213-15

This represents a point of difference from the *Iliad.* Before the fighting began, the Greeks had sent Ulysses and Menelaus (not Diomedes) to Troy, under a flag of truce, to demand the return of Helen. This is referred to in Book Three of the *Iliad.*

It is, however, very easy to associate Diomedes with Ulysses, for they often acted in concert in the legends about Troy. In the *Iliad* it is Ulysses and Diomedes who act in concert in Book Ten to kill Rhesus the Thracian.

In later myths they are also joined. Thus, the two together sneak into Troy itself in order to steal the Palladium, an image of Minerva (Athena), who bore the alternate name of Pallas, after which the object, holy to her, was named. This was supposed to guard the city and it was not until it was stolen that the city became vulnerable.

> Tomorrow do I meet thee …

As the fourth act ends, it would seem that a well-rounded climax is clearly being prepared. Troilus approaches Ulysses to ask where Calchas' tent might be located. Ulysses has shown that he admires Troilus and despises Cressida, and it is no great feat to guess that he

will be the instrument whereby Troilus will learn of Cressida's infidelity.

As for Achilles, Ulysses' plan has worked wonderfully. He is a new man and when Hector twits him for not fighting, he says:

> Dost thou entreat me, Hector?
> Tomorrow do I meet thee, jell as death;
>
> —Act IV, scene v, lines 267-68

What, then, ought we to expect in the fifth act? Troilus will learn of Cressida's faithlessness, we can be sure, and will go raving out on the field to avenge himself on the Greeks. Perhaps he is to be killed by Diomedes, perhaps by Achilles-but he must die. Troilus dies, in the Greek legends that deal with him, before Achilles' spear, and of what dramatic value is it to survive under the conditions of the tragedy as outlined in this play?

Achilles must also kill Hector, since that is an absolute necessity; all versions of the Troy legend agree there. In the *Iliad* Achilles returns to the fight only after Hector has killed Patroclus, but perhaps Shakespeare might not have needed that part of Homer's plot. After all, Shakespeare's presentation of Patroclus scarcely fits the notion of that effeminate as a doughty warrior. (Homer's presentation of Patroclus was quite different.) Shakespeare might well have felt it would be more satisfactory to have Ulysses' plan stand as the spring that set Achilles to fighting again.

Then, Cressida must die too. Perhaps by her own hand out of contrition or perhaps, in shame, after being cast off by a disgusted, or sated, or callous Diomedes.

Indeed, a century before *Troilus and Cressida* was written, a Scottish poet named Robert Henryson had written a continuation of Chaucer's tale and called it *Testament of Cresseid.* It was so close an imitation of Chaucer that for a while it was considered authentically Chaucerian and in 1532 was actually included in an edition of Chaucer's works.

In the *Testament* Diomedes grows tired of Cressida and casts her off. Cressida rails against Venus and Cupid and is stricken by them with leprosy in punishment. Her face and body utterly altered by this loathsome disease, she begs by the roadside, and Troilus, magnificent on his horse, passes her and tosses her a coin, without recognizing her.

It is a crude denouement, and a savage one, and we could hope that the gentle Shakespeare might never have felt tempted to adopt it, but it was popular and shows what an audience would like in the way

of dramatic retribution.

What does Shakespeare really do, then?

Very little, really. The fifth act falls apart and *Troilus and Cressida,* which is tight enough and sensible enough through the first four acts, becomes a rather unsatisfactory play as a result of the fifth act. While it is not my intention in this book to make literary judgments, it appears that the fifth act is so poor that some critics have suggested that Shakespeare did not write it.

We can imagine such a possibility. Suppose that Essex's execution had taken place while Shakespeare was writing *Troilus and Cressida.* He might have written the fourth act savagely, putting Cressida in her place, and then have found the whole thing too unpleasant to continue. If he abandoned the play, some other member of the actors' company of which Shakespeare was a member may have worked up an ending for the play; one that could not match what had gone before, naturally.

Or perhaps we don't have to go that far. It is not absolutely essential to absolve Shakespeare of every inferior passage in his plays. He may have been the greatest writer who ever lived but he was still a man and not a god. He could still write hurriedly; he could still write halfheartedly. And with Essex's execution burning him, he may have botched the last act himself.

.. a letter from Queen Hecuba

Just as the fifth act begins there is a sudden retreat from the situation as it had been developed at the end of the fourth act. Suddenly Thersites delivers a letter to Achilles, who reads it and says:

> My sweet Patroclus, I am thwarted quite
> From my great purpose in tomorrow's battle.
> Here is a letter from Queen Hecuba,
> A token from her daughter, my fair love,
> Both taxing me and gaging me to keep
> An oath that I have sworn. 1 will not break it.

—Act V, scene i, lines 38-43

So all of Ulysses' careful planning, all his wisdom and slyness, go suddenly for nothing, and when Achilles is brought to battle it will be in Homer's fashion. In that case, why should Shakespeare have introduced Ulysses' plot at all? It is almost as though another hand,

taking up the fifth act, having no idea as to what Shakespeare intended, fell back on Homer in default of anything else.

> … Ariachne's broken woof…

Meanwhile Ulysses has guided Troilus to Calchas' tent, where the young man quickly sees that Cressida is false. The conversation is one long, shallow flirtation of Cressida with Diomedes. She even gives him as a token the very sleeve that Troilus had given her.

The brokenhearted Troilus tries to chop logic and convince himself that he does not really see his Cressida; that there are two Cressidas. One is Diomedes' Cressida, a faithless, worthless woman; and the other, secure in his own mind, is his ideal Cressida, faithful and true. Yet he must admit that this separation is not real, that somehow the two are one:

> And yet the spacious breadth of this division
> Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
> As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 147-49

Arachne (not "Ariachne," a change Shakespeare makes to save the meter, apparently) was a Lydian woman so proud of her skill as a weaver that she challenged Minerva (Athena) herself to compete with her. In the competition, Arachne produced a tapestry into which those myths that were uncomplimentary to the gods were woven. When she was done, Minerva could find no fault with it and petulantly tore it to shreds. Arachne tried to hang herself, but Minerva, somewhat remorsefully, saved her life, changed the girl into a spider and the rope into a strand of spider web.

Troilus is saying that not even the finest strand of a spider's web can really be fit between the two Cressidas he is trying to conjure up. He realizes that there is only one Cressida and that he has been betrayed.

> … The fierce Polydamas

And now suddenly the play explodes into a battle scene, something which the *Iliad* is fiercely crammed with. It begins with Hector arming himself for the fray despite the pleas of his wife

Andromache, his sister Cassandra, and his father Priam. Troilus, on the other hand, urges him into the battle with savage forcefulness, for he longs for revenge on Diomedes.

The tide of battle goes against the Greeks to begin with and Agamemnon comes on stage to rally his men:

> Renew, renew! The fierce Polydamas
> Hath beat down Menon;

—Act V, scene v, lines 6-7

Polydamas appears briefly in the *Iliad* as a friend of Hector's, one who counsels moderation. In Book Twelve, when the Trojan fortunes are beginning to ride high, Polydamas cautions against cocksureness and predicts the end may be disaster. Trojans are winning victories because Achilles is not fighting, but what if he rejoins the battle?

It is to him that Hector makes a famous rejoinder. In quite an un-Homeric mood, he derides all the omens, all the worries about whether birds are flying on the right or on the left, and says: "A divine message? The best divine message is: 'Defend your country!'."

> … Palamedes

Menon, whom Polydamas has "beat down," does not appear in the *Iliad,* nor do most of the other names that Agamemnon calls out, recounting the tale of defeats in sonorous syllables.

One name, however, perhaps by accident, is memorable, though he does not appear in the *Iliad.* Agamemnon speaks of:

> … Palamedes Sore hurt and bruised.

—Act V, scene v, lines 13-14

Palamedes appears in the later myths as a man almost as shrewd as Ulysses himself. When the heroes were gathering to go to Troy, Menelaus and Palamedes traveled to Ithaca to urge Ulysses to come. Ulysses had learned from an oracle that if he went he would not return for twenty years and then penniless and alone, so he pretended to be mad. He guided a plow along the seashore, sowing salt instead of seed. Palamedes watched the display cynically, and suddenly placed

Ulysses' one-year-old son, Telemachus, in the path of the plow. Ulysses turned it aside and his pretense of madness was broken.

Ulysses never forgave Palamedes and eventually engineered his death by having him framed for treason. This happened before the *Iliad* opens and there is no hint concerning it in Homer's tale.

This speech of Agamemnon's reflects the situation in Book Fifteen of the *Iliad.* Achilles obdurately refuses to fight; a number of the Greek chieftains, including Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Ulysses, have been wounded, and the Trojan fortunes are at their peak. The Greeks have fallen back to their very ships and the Trojans, with Hector leading them on, are bringing the torches with which to set those ships on fire.

> Patroclus ta'en …

But in the course of Agamemnon's cry, however, one significant phrase creeps in:

> Patroclus ta'en or slain.

—Act V, scene v, line 13

Thus, in four words, is masked the most dramatic portion of the *Iliad.* Achilles, having brutally rejected Agamemnon's offer of amends in Book Nine, forfeits the side of right and must, in his turn, begin to pay.

That payment comes in Book Sixteen, when Patroclus, horror-stricken at the Greek defeat and at the imminent burning of their ships, begs Achilles to let him enter the fight. Achilles agrees. He allows Patroclus to wear Achilles' own armor, but warns him merely to drive the Trojans from the ships and not to attempt to assault the city.

Patroclus does well. The Trojans are driven back, but the excitement of battle causes him to forget Achilles' advice. He pursues the fleeing Trojans, is stopped by Hector, and killed.

> … bear Patroclus' body…

Agamemnon's remark that Patroclus is either taken or slain is soon settled in favor of the latter alternative. Nestor enters, saying:

Go, bear Patroclus' body to Achilles,

—Act V, scene v, line 17

Again, in a few words, many dramatic deeds in the *Iliad* are slurred over. In Book Seventeen there is a gigantic struggle over Patroclus' body. Hector manages to strip the dead man of the armor of Achilles, but the Greeks save the body itself in a fight in which Menelaus and Ajax do particularly well. In the *Iliad* it is Menelaus who sends the message to Achilles, not Nestor, but then it is Nestor's son, Antilochus (who does not appear in *Troilus and Cressida)*, who actually carries the message.

… *Great Achilles* Events follow quickly. Ulysses comes onstage, crying:

O courage, courage, princes! Great Achilles
Is arming, weeping, cursing, vowing vengeance!
Patroclus' wounds have roused his drowsy blood,

—Act V, scene v, lines 30-32

So it happens in the *Iliad.* Achilles, paid back for his intransigence, realizes too late that he has sulked in his tent too long. In the *Iliad,* however, he doesn't arm so quickly. He has no armor, for he had given it to Patroclus, who had lost it to Hector.

A new set of armor must be forged for Achilles by Vulcan himself, something to which Book Eighteen of the *Iliad* is devoted. In Book Nineteen there is the formal reconciliation of Agamemnon and Achilles, and only then, in Book Twenty, does Achilles join the battle.

.. . I'll hunt thee for thy hide

In Books Twenty, Twenty-one, and Twenty-two, Achilles is at war, and none can stand before him. Indeed, in those three books, no Greek warrior but Achilles is mentioned. It is as though he, a single man, fights alone against the Trojans (with occasional help from one god or another) and defeats them.

In Book Twenty-two, when the Trojan army has fled within the walls of Troy in fear of the raging Achilles, Hector at last comes out alone to meet him in the climactic battle of the *Iliad.* But the issue is

never hi doubt.

The onrush of Achilles daunts even Hector, and at the last moment he turns to flee, trying to find his way safe through one of the city gates. Achilles heads him off and three times they run completely round the city (which can only be village-size by modern standards).

Only then does Hector turn, perforce, to face Achilles, and is killed!

None of this can appear in *Troilus and Cressida.* The medieval poets, with their pro-Trojan/Roman prejudice, had to treat Hector much more gently, and Shakespeare inherits that attitude from them.

He has the two champions fight indeed, but it is Achilles who has to fall back, weakening. Hector says, gallantly,

> Pause, if thou wilt.

—Act V, scene vi, line 14

And Achilles goes off, muttering that he is out of practice.

Yet something must be done to account for the fact that Hector does indeed die at the hands of Achilles, so Shakespeare makes the former do a most un-Hectorish thing. Hector meets an unnamed Greek in rich armor and decides he wants it. When the Greek tries to run, Hector calls out:

> Wilt thou not, beast, abide?
> Why then, fly on, I'll hunt thee for thy hide.

—Act V, scene vi, lines 30-31

Nowhere in Homer, nor anywhere else in this play, does Hector give anyone reason to think he would ever call a foeman "beast" or take the attitude that war is a hunt, with other men playing the role of animals, and it is partly because of this that some critics doubt that Shakespeare wrote the last act. And yet it is necessary for Hector to do something of this sort, in order that he might earn the retribution that now falls upon him.

> … Troy, sink down

Hector catches his prey and kills him. It is late in the day and

Hector decides the day's fight is over. Perhaps he is helped to that decision by his eagerness to try on the new armor he has won. At any rate, he takes off his own armor, stands unprotected-and at that moment, Achilles and a contingent of his Myrmidons appear on the scene.

Hector cries out that he is unarmed, but Achilles orders his men to kill, and then says, in grim satisfaction:

> So, Ilion, fall thou next! Come, Troy, sink down!
> Here lies thy heart, thy sinews, and thy bone.

—Act V, scene viii, lines 11-12

For Achilles to kill Hector in this way is unthinkable in a Homeric context and must strike any lover of the *Iliad* as simple sacrilege. But there it is-the medieval pro-Trojan, pro-Hector view.

> … wells and Niobes. ..

Troilus bears the news of Hector's death to the Trojan army:

> Go in to Troy, and say there Hector's dead.
> There is a word will Priam turn to stone,
> Make wells and Niobes of the maids and wives,

—Act V, scene x, lines 17-19

Niobe was a Theban queen, a daughter of Tantalus (see page I-13), whose pride in her six sons and six daughters led her to boast herself the superior of the goddess Latona (Leto), who had only one of each. La-tona's children, however, happened to be Apollo and Diana.

To avenge the taunt, Apollo and Diana shot down all twelve children, the twelfth in Niobe's arms. She wept continuously after that, day after day, until the gods, in pity, turned her to stone, with a spring of tears still bubbling out and trickling down.

> … no more to say

This essentially ends the play. As Troilus says:

Hector is dead; there is no more to say.

—Act V, scene x, line 22

To be sure, Troilus promises revenge on the Greeks and on Achilles particularly, but that is just talk. There can be no revenge. Troy must fall.

Nor has Troilus revenge on Diomedes or Cressida. Diomedes still lives and still has Cressida.

The fifth act is an ending of sorts, but it is not the ending toward which the first four acts were heading.

5. The Life of Timon Of Athens

Shakespeare wrote a narrative poem and three plays set in the legendary days of Greek history. He wrote only one play that was based- in a very tenuous way-in the days of Greece's greatest glory, the fifth century b.c.

This century was the Golden Age of Athens, when she beat off giant Persia and built a naval empire, when she had great leaders like Themis-tocles, Aristides, and Pericles; great dramatists like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes; great sculptors like Phidias; great scientists like Anaxagoras; great philosophers like Socrates and Plato.

But Shakespeare chose to mark the time by writing a play, *Timon of Athens,* that is generally considered one of his least satisfactory. Many critics consider it to be an unfinished play, one that Shakespeare returned to on and off, never patching it to his liking, and eventually abandoning it.

… the Lord Timon.. .

The play opens in the house of a rich man. A Poet, a Painter, a Jeweler, and a Merchant all enter. They are given no names but are identified only by their professions. The Jeweler has a jewel and the Merchant says:

O pray let's see't. For the Lord Timon, sir?

—Act I, scene i, line 13

The Lord Timon is the owner of the house; the center toward which all these and others are tending.

Timon is, apparently, a historical character who lived in Athens during the Peloponnesian War (431-404 b.c.-eight centuries after the Trojan War), so that we may set the opening of the play in the last quarter of the fifth century b.c.

Timon's fame to his contemporaries and near successors, such as Aristophanes and Plato, lay entirely in the fact that he was a misanthrope. In fact, he was referred to as "Timon Misanthropes" ("Timon the ManHater"). He lived by himself, professed to hate mankind and to detest human society. To the sociable Greeks, to

whom conversation and social intercourse were the breath of life, there was something monstrous in this. Plutarch, in his "Life of Mark Antony," describes how, at a low point in his career, Antony decided for a while to imitate Timon and withdraw from human society. Shakespeare may have come across this while working on his play *Antony and Cleopatra* (see page I-370) and conceived the idea of writing a play centered on the condition of misanthropy. And, indeed, *Timon of Athens* seems to have been written immediately after *Antony and Cleopatra,* in 1606 or 1607.

The senators of Athens …

Additional men enter and the Poet identifies them, saying:

The senators of Athens, happy men!

—Act I, scene i, line 40

Throughout the play Shakespeare treats Athens, with whose social and political life he is unacquainted, as though it were Rome, a city with which he was much more at home. Athens had no senators or anything quite equivalent to the well-known legislators of Rome. Yet Shakespeare, throughout the play, has the rulers of Athens act like the stern, irascible, grasping Roman aristocrats, rather than like the gay, impulsive, weathercock democrats they really were.

Indeed, so anxious does Shakespeare appear to be to deal with Rome rather than with Athens, that almost every character in the play has a Roman name. This is quite out of the question in reality, of course. No Roman name was ever heard of in Athens of Timon's time. Rome itself had never been heard of. If Rome had forced itself on the attention of any Athenian of the time, it would have seemed only a barbarian Italian village of utterly no account.

Feigned Fortune.. .

But Timon is not yet Misanthropes. He is, at the beginning of the play, an extremely wealthy man of almost unbelievable benevolence. He seeks for excuses to give money away and every man there is trying to get his share.

Yet the Poet, at least, is not entirely fooled by the superficial appearance of wealth and happiness that surrounds Timon. He speaks

of his poetry to the Painter, and describes its content by saying:

> Sir, I have upon a high and pleasant hill
> Feigned Fortune to be throned.

—Act I, scene i, lines 63-64

The goddess of fortune (Fortuna to the Romans and Tyche to the Greeks) became popular in the period that followed Greece's Golden Age. Alexander the Great had come and gone like lightning across the skies, bringing Greece vast conquests and vast derangements. The individual Greek cities came to be helpless in the grip of generals and armies; culture decayed as materialism grew and the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer.

Fortune was a deity of chance and was just right for the age following Alexander the Great; an age which saw the passing of youth and confidence, and in which good and evil seemed to be handed out at random and without any consideration of desert.

The Poet explains that Fortune beckons benignly and Timon mounts the hill, carrying with him all those he befriends. But Fortune is fickle and Timon may be kicked down the hill by her. In that case, none of the friends he took up the hill with him will follow him down.

Shakespeare is, in this way, preparing the audience for the consideration of what it was that made Timon a misanthrope.

Plutarch says only that "… for the unthankfulness of those he had done good unto and whom he took to be his friends, he was angry with all men and would trust no man."

Another similar treatment of Timon at much greater length was by a Greek writer, Lucian, born in Syria about a.d. 120. He had written twenty-six *Dialogues of the Gods,* in which he poked satirical fun at conventional religion, but so pleasantly that even the pious must have found it difficult to take offense.

His best essay is considered to be "Timon," in which he uses the theme of a man who has become misanthropic through the ingratitude of others to poke fun at Jupiter and at Wealth. He expands on the hint in Plutarch and makes Timon out to have been, originally, a fantastically generous man who beggared himself for his friends and then found none who would help him.

Shakespeare adopted this notion, but removed all the fun and humor in Lucian's dialogue and replaced it with savagery.

> … a dog

Timon himself now enters, and moves among all those present with affability and generosity, giving to all who ask, denying no one. He accepts their rather sickening sycophancy with good humor, but accepts it.

There is only one sour note and that is when the philosopher Apemantus enters. He is churlish and his every speech is a curt insult The Painter strikes back with:

> Y'are a dog.
>
> —Act I, scene i, line 202

This is not a mere insult, but, in a way, a statement of fact, if a slightly anachronistic one.

About 400 b.c. a philosopher named Antisthenes taught that virtue was more important than riches or comfort and that, indeed, poverty was welcome, for wealth and luxury were corrupting. One of his pupils was Diogenes, who lived near Corinth about 350 b.c. and who carried Antisthenes' teachings to an extreme.

Diogenes lived in the greatest possible destitution to show that people needed no belongings to be virtuous. He loudly derided all the polite social customs of the day, denouncing them as hypocrisy.

Diogenes and those who followed him made ordinary men uncomfortable. These grating philosophers seemed to bark and snarl at all that made life pleasant. They were called *kynikos* ("doglike") because of their snarling, and this became "cynic" in English.

Diogenes accepted the name and became "Diogenes the Cynic." Apemantus is pictured in this play as a Cynic a century before the term became fashionable, and when the Painter calls him a dog, he is really dismissing him as a Cynic.

Apemantus' insults extend even to Timon. When the Poet tries to defend Timon, Apemantus considers it mere flattery and says, crushingly:

> He that loves to be flattered
> is worthy o'th'flatterer.
>
> —Act I, scene i, lines 229-30

This is the first clear statement that Timon, despite appearances, is not entirely to be admired. He is extremely generous, but is it in order to do good, or in order to be flattered and fawned upon? There

is something so public, ostentatious, and indiscriminate in his benevolences that they grow suspect.

'Tis Alcibiades…

A messenger comes in with the announcement of new visitors;

Tis Alcibiades and some twenty horse,

—Act I, scene i, line 246

Alcibiades is the only character in the play who has an important role in Athenian history. He was an Athenian general of noble birth, handsome and brilliant, who in the end turned traitor and did Athens infinite harm.

He is brought into the play because Plutarch uses him as an occasion for an example of Timon's misanthropy. The one man Timon made much of was Alcibiades, and when asked why that was, Timon answered, harshly, "I do it because I know that one day he shall do great mischief unto the Athenians."

This is rather better and more specific insight than individuals are likely to have, and in all probability the story is apocryphal and was invented long after Alcibiades had demonstrated the harm he did Athens.

… Plutus, the god of gold

Timon is giving a feast that night as he is wont to do. In fact, one Lord who means to partake of it says of him:

He pours it out. Plutus,
the god of gold, Is but his steward …

—Act I, scene i, lines 283-84

Plutus is related, by name and origin, to Pluto, the king of the underworld, and represents the wealth of the soil, both mineral and vegetable (see page I-115).

The later Greeks considered Plutus to be a son of Fortune, who had been blinded by Jupiter so that he gives his gifts indiscriminately.

In Lu-cian's dialogue, Wealth is also pictured as blind and as giving his gifts to anyone he happens to bump into. Thus, once again, Timon's wealth is associated with chance and its slippery nature made plain.

What's more, Timon will give, but won't receive. He says as much to Ventidius, one of his guests at the feast. Ventidius tries to thank him for favors received, but Timon says:

> You mistake my love;
> I gave it freely ever, and there's none
> Can truly say he gives, if he receives.
>
> —Act I, scene ii, lines 9-11

In this respect, though, Timon seems to aspire to be a god, since surely only a god can always give, never receive. Furthermore, Timon would deprive others of the act of giving, which he apparently considers the supreme pleasure. Would he reserve the supreme pleasure exclusively for himself?

It is almost as though Timon were divorcing himself from mankind through the unique act of giving without receiving. He will not condescend to be human and in that respect he (so to speak) hates mankind. Perhaps Shakespeare meant to show (if he could have polished the play into final form) that a man does not become a misanthrope unless he has been one all along. Perhaps he meant to show that Timon did not pass from benevolence to misanthropy but merely changed from one form of misanthropy to another.

> A thousand talents. ..

The banquet ends in a general donation to everyone by Timon, so that cynical Apemantus guesses that Timon will be going bankrupt soon. The guess is correct and even conservative, for though Timon doesn't know it (scorning, like a god, to inquire into the status of his wealth) he is already deep in debt.

His creditors (whom his steward has long been holding off) will be restrained no longer, and not long after the banquet Timon is told the situation. All astonished, he finds out that all his land is sold, all his cash is spent, all his assets gone. Yet he will not accept the reproaches of his steward but is cheerfully confident he can borrow from his many adoring friends.

He sends his servants to various people who are in debt to him for past favors and tells them to ask, casually, for large sums. The

steward, Flavius, he sends to the senators so that the city treasury may reward him for money he had in the past given it. He tells Flavius:

> Bid 'em send o'th'instant
> A thousand talents to me.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 208-9

A talent was a huge sum of money. It is equal to nearly sixty pounds of silver, and by modern standards it is equivalent to about two thousand dollars. What Timon was so cavalierly asking for "o'th'instant" was two million dollars. The city of Athens could not possibly have made available that sum of money to a private person "o'th'instant."

The ridiculous size of the sum requested is sometimes taken as an indication that Shakespeare did not know how much a talent was worth, and either hadn't done the necessary research by the time he abandoned the play, or, if he had, never got around to changing the figures throughout.

What is even more likely to be a mistake appears a little later, as scene after scene passes in which Timon's servants vainly try to borrow money from those whom earlier the once rich man had so loaded with benefits. Thus, Lucius, one of those so benefited, says, incredulously, to one of the pleading servants:

> / know his lordship is but merry with me.
> He cannot want fifty five hundred talents.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 40-41

He cannot indeed. That would be some 160 *tons* of silver. A private person of Timon's time simply could not have had so much wealth to hand out on the moment. Perhaps Shakespeare was dithering between fifty talents and five hundred talents, wondering if the latter was too great, and, having written in both, never got around to erasing one or the other by the time he had abandoned the play.

It is tempting to despise those whom Timon had so benefited and who were now so lost to gratitude. But let us be reasonable. Timon had *forced* the benefits on his friends, eager to demonstrate godlike generosity. Should those friends now deliver their money to someone who had displayed such abysmal lack of understanding of personal

finance? Whatever they gave him would surely be lost forever and at once.

Naturally, Timon did not look at it that way at all. His pretensions to superhuman wealth and benevolence had been punctured and he found himself in a towering rage of frustration and humiliation as a result.

> At Lacedaemon…

Meanwhile, Alcibiades is having an argument of his own with the Athenian Senate. Some soldier is under sentence of death for murder and Alcibiades is pleading for a reversal of the sentence on the grounds that death came as a result of an honorable duel fought in anger that had come about because the man under sentence had been bitterly offended.

Who the soldier is, what the occasion, why the Senate is so harsh or Alcibiades so insistent are not explained. Shakespeare had inserted the scene, perhaps the best in the play, but had never gotten around to supplying the mortar that would connect it properly to what had gone before. It seems clear, though, that Shakespeare is setting up a subplot to show another facet of the "ingratitude" theme. Alcibiades says of the soldier:

> His service done
> At Lacedaemon and Byzantium
> Were a sufficient briber for his life.

—Act III, scene v, lines 60-62

This vaguely suits the Peloponnesian War, which was going on in the lifetime of Timon and Alcibiades. Athens was fighting a coalition led by the city of Sparta, of which an alternate (and, in some respects, more nearly official) name was Lacedaemon.

However, the speech makes it sound as though there was fighting at Lacedaemon, and that wasn't so. The city of Sparta, protected by its unparalleled army, was unapproachable throughout the sixth and fifth centuries b.c. It was not until Sparta suffered a shattering defeat at the hands of Thebes, thirty years after the Peloponnesian War, that the city became vulnerable.

Nor were there important battles at Byzantium (the later Constantinople and the still later Istanbul), though it occupied a strategic position at the straits between the Aegean Sea and the Black

Sea, not very far from where Troy had once been situated.

> We banish thee…

When Alcibiades continues to plead the soldier's cause, the First Senator, austere and obdurate in Roman rather than Athenian manner, finally says:

> Do you dare our anger?
> 'Tis in few words, but spacious in effect:
> We banish thee for ever.

—Act III, scene v, lines 95-97

In actual history, Alcibiades was indeed banished from Athens, but not for so personal and trivial a cause. In 415 b.c. he had urged that Athens end the long war with Sparta by a very daring move, nothing less than an invasion of Sicily and the capture of its chief city, Syracuse, which had been supporting the Spartan cause financially.

A victory in Sicily would have transferred Syracuse's navy and wealth to the Athenian side, given Athens a secure base in the west, and broken the morale of the Spartan coalition. It was a desperate gamble, but under Alcibiades it might just possibly have succeeded.

The Athenians, however, voted another general, Nicias, as co-com-mander, and this was a terrible mistake. Nicias was an "appeaser," anxious to make a deal with Sparta, and couldn't possibly be expected to supply vigorous leadership-especially since he was a most incompetent general in any case.

To make matters worse, just before the expedition was to set sail, certain religious statues in the city were blasphemously mutilated, and suspicion fell upon Alcibiades, who was a known agnostic.

To be sure, Alcibiades would scarcely have been so insane as to have chosen this time to play the scofier in so ostentatious a manner. Although the mystery of who mutilated the statues has never been solved, most historians feel it must have been Alcibiades' enemies who did it, and that Alcibiades was framed.

At first, proceedings against Alcibiades were ordered suspended till the Sicilian expedition was over, but then after the fleet got under way, the Athenians changed their mind and recalled Alcibiades. Alcibiades was certain that he couldn't possibly escape conviction and so he went voluntarily into exile.

The Sicilian expedition, be it noted, came to utter grief without

him. A huge Athenian force, both men and ships, was utterly destroyed and Athens never truly recovered. She was never again, after the Sicilian expedition, what she had been before it. Because it was Alcibiades who had urged it on, he had brought great harm to Athens (as Timon, according to Plutarch, had foreseen) and was yet to do more.

… hated be of Timon…

Back we go to Timon's house, where Timon has called back his friends for another banquet. All the men who had just refused to lend Timon money are now back at their old places. They don't know how Timon has managed to recover, but if he is conducting feasts, they intend to be at the trough.

They are as servile as ever and Timon appears as affable as ever, but when it is time to eat of the covered dishes, Timon reveals them to be full of water and nothing more. Timon throws the water in their faces, curses them, and drives them away, crying out:

Burn house, sink Athens, henceforth hated be
Of Timon man and all humanity.

—Act III, scene vi, lines 105-6

There is the transition. Timon goes from universal benevolence to universal malevolence. In both roles, he has held himself far removed from ordinary mankind, but in the latter he at least requires no wealth.

Timon leaves his home and the city. He finds himself a cave outside Athens and spends his time in cursing. He digs and finds gold (a device borrowed from Lucian's dialogue), but that does not soften his hardened heart or soothe his poisoned soul.

This fell whore…

Now a parade of people comes seeking Timon in the cave. (After all, he is rich again.) The first, by accident rather than by design, for Timon's wealth is not yet known, is Alcibiades, who is marching against Athens at the head of a rebel army and who at first fails to recognize Timon.

Alcibiades is accompanied by two prostitutes whom Timon does

not fail to condemn. He says to Alcibiades concerning one of them:

> This fell whore of thine
> Hath in her more destruction than thy sword,
> For all her cherubin look.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 62-64

The "fell whore" in question is Phrynia, whose name is inspired by a famous Athenian courtesan named Phryne who flourished in the time of Alexander the Great, a century after Alcibiades. She grew immensely rich from her earnings, for she had as her customers the most distinguished men of the time and she charged healthy fees. The most famous story told of her is that once when she was brought before a court, accused of profaning certain religious rites, she exposed her breasts to the judges and was acquitted on the spot.

… proud Athens on a heap

Alcibiades expresses sympathy for Timon, offers him money, and begins:

> When I have laid proud Athens on a heap-

—Act IV, scene iii, line 102

The historical Alcibiades, when he fled Athens, went to Sparta, his city's bitter enemy, and there advised that enemy how best to conduct its war. For a period of time he virtually directed Sparta's armies, much more intelligently and effectively than Spartan generals had been able to do. In that sense, Alcibiades was marching against Athens.

But when, in the play, Alcibiades talks of destroying Athens, Timon interrupts to wish him all success in that task, together with the destruction of himself afterward. And before they go, he heaps bitter speeches on the courtesans as he gives them quantities of his own gold.

> The middle of humanity. ..

Apemantus now comes in. The old and practiced Cynic can now bandy insults with the new-made Misanthropes. Shakespeare bases this on a tale of Plutarch's, intending to show how Timon, in his universal hatred, outdid the Cynics. He tells how Apemantus once, when dining with Timon, they two being all the company, commented on how pleasant it was to feast alone without hated mankind present, and Timon answered morosely, "It would be, if you were not present."

Thus, when in the play Apemantus offers to give Timon food, and mend his diet, Timon says:

> First mend my company, take away thyself,

—Act IV, scene iii, line 284

But Apemantus is not fooled. He was not impressed by Timon playing god, and he is not impressed by Timon playing dog. (It is odd that in English, god and dog are the same letters in mirror image.) Apemantus says, cynically:

> Art thou proud yet?

—Act IV, scene iii, line 278

He says even more sharply:

> The middle of humanity thou never knewest,
> but the extremity of both ends.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 301-2

The rumor of Timon's gold spreads. Thieves come to relieve him of it, but he gives it to them with such malevolent glee at the harm it will do them that they leave most uneasily.

His old steward, Flavius, arrives weeping, and asks only to continue to serve Timon. Even Timon's withered heart is touched and he is forced to retreat one inch from his universal hatred. He says:

> I do proclaim
> One honest man.

Mistake me not, but one.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 505-6

Here Timon seems to have faced mankind and found himself momentarily to be neither god nor dog, but "the middle of humanity." Had he found himself permanently back to that middle, the play might have been more satisfactory, but Shakespeare blunders onward through the thicket of unrelieved misanthropy.

… hang himself

The Poet and the Painter arrive to get their share of the gold by pretending selfless love of Timon, but Timon overhears their plotting and drives them away.

Then come Athenian Senators, pleading with Timon to take over the leadership of the city's forces in order to turn back Alcibiades, who is battering at the city's walls, but Timon states bitterly that he doesn't care what Alcibiades does to Athens. Shakespeare now makes use of still another anecdote in Plutarch.

He announces one favor he will do Athens. He has a tree that he is about to chop down, but he urges the Senators to announce to all Athenians who wish to take advantage of the offer to:

Come hither ere my tree hath felt the ax,
And hang himself.

—Act V, scene i, lines 212-13

Those enemies of Timon's. ..

Timon dies, unreconciled to the end, and Athens must surrender to Alcibiades.

This did not happen quite so in history.

Rather, Alcibiades finally fell out with the Spartans (the story is that he was a little too familiar with one of the Spartan queens and the Spartan King resented it) and returned to Athenian allegiance. They welcomed him back because the war was going more and more badly and they needed him. In 407 b.c. he made a triumphant return

to Athens and in that sense, Athens might be viewed as having surrendered to him.

The Athenians, however, could never bring themselves to trust him, and the next year he was exiled again, this time permanently.

The play does not go that far. It ends with the reconciliation, as Alcibiades says:

> Those enemies of Timon's and mine own
> Whom you yourselves shall set out for reproof,
> Fall, and no more.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 56-58

Alcibiades lets himself be placated and reconciled, where Timon did not, and it is plain that the former is displayed as the preferable course.

Timon is dead by then, but the epitaph he wrote for himself is brought in and Alcibiades reads it-Timon's final word (taken from Plutarch).

> Here lie I, Timon, -who alive all living men did hate.
> Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass, and stay not here thy gait.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 72-73

6. The Winter's Tale

The winter's tale is a romance. It has no historical basis whatever and none of the events it describes ever occurred; nor are any of its characters to be found in history, however glancingly. Nevertheless, its background lies in the pre-Christian Greek world. I therefore include it among the Greek plays.

It seems to have been one of Shakespeare's latest plays, too, having been written as late as 1611. The only later play for which Shakespeare was solely responsible was *The Tempest.*

> .., the King of Sicilia means to pay Bohemia …

The play opens with two courtiers exchanging graceful compliments. The scene is set in Sicilia (Sicily) and one of the courtiers, Camillo, is native to the place. The other is a vistor from Bohemia.

The occasion is a state visit paid to Sicily by the King of Bohemia, and there may be a return visit in consequence. Camillo says:

> I think this coming summer the King of Sicilia
> means to pay Bohemia the visitation
> which he justly owes him.

—Act I, scene i, lines 5-7

There is a queer reversal here. Shakespeare takes the plot from a romance written in 1588 by the English writer Robert Greene, entitled *Pandosto. The Triumph of Time.* In Greene's original romance the story opens with a visit of the King of Sicily to Bohemia, rather than the reverse. This reversal is carried all through the play, with the King of Sicily in *The Winter's Tale* playing the role of the King of Bohemia in *Pandosto,* and vice versa.

Did Shakespeare make a casual slip of the pen to begin with and then carry it through because he was too lazy to take the trouble to correct it? Or did he have some good reason?-I suspect the latter.

The King who is being visited behaves, in the first portion of the play, as an almost psychotically suspicious tyrant. Should this king be the King of Bohemia, as in Greene, or the King of Sicily, as in Shakespeare?

Suppose we look back into history. In 405 b.c., just ten years after

the ill-fated Sicilian expedition of Athens (see page I-140), a general, Dionysius, seized control over Syracuse, the largest and strongest city of Sicily. By 383 b.c. he had united almost the entire island under his rule.

Dionysius is best known for the manner in which he kept himself in power for thirty-eight years in an era when rulers were regularly overthrown by palace coups or popular unrest. He did so by unending suspicion and eternal vigilance. For instance, there is a story that he had a bell-shaped chamber opening into the state prison, with the narrow end connecting to his room. In this way, he could secretly listen to conversations in the prison and learn if any conspiracies were brewing. This has been called the "ear of Dionysius."

He arrested people on mere suspicion and his suspicion was most easily aroused. Naturally, he left the memory of himself behind in most unsavory fashion and though he died in peace, he is remembered as a cruel and suspicious tyrant.

If Shakespeare had to choose between Bohemia and Sicily as a place to be ruled by a tyrant, was it not sensible to choose Sicily?

Of course, King Leontes of Sicily, the character in the play, is not to be equated with Dionysius. The Sicilian tyrant of old may simply have made Sicily seem the more appropriate scene for tyranny, but there all resemblance ends and nothing in the play has any relationship to the life of Dionysius.

Nevertheless, because of this tenuous connection between Leontes and Dionysius, and the fact that Dionysius lived a generation after Timon, I am placing this play immediately after *Timon of Athens*.

As for Bohemia… Later in the play there will be scenes of idyllic pastoral happiness in the kingdom of the visiting monarch. Shall that other kingdom then be Sicily, as in Greene, or Bohemia, as in Shakespeare?

To be sure, in ancient times Sicily was an agricultural province that served as the granary of early Rome. It might therefore be viewed as an idyllic place in contrast to citified and vice-ridden Rome itself. However, Sicily was also noted for its brutal wars between the Greeks and Carthage and, later, the Romans and Carthage. Still later, it was the scene of horrible slave rebellions.

What of Bohemia by contrast? The Bohemia we know is the westernmost part of modern Czechoslovakia and is no more a pastoral idyll than anywhere else. This Bohemia is inhabited by a Slavic people, in Shakespeare's time as well as in our own, and its origin, as a Slavic nation, dates back to perhaps the eighth century, something like a thousand years after the time of Dionysius.

This discrepancy in time did not bother Greene, or Shakespeare either, and would not bother us in reading the play. However, is it

necessarily our

present real-life Bohemia that Shakespeare was thinking of? Was there another?

Shortly after 1400, bands of strange people reached central Europe. They were swarthy-skinned nomads, who spoke a language that was not like any in Europe. Some Europeans thought they came from Egypt and they were called "gypsies" in consequence. (They still are called that in the United States, but their real origin may have been India.)

When the gypsies reached Paris in 1427, the French knew only that they had come from central Europe. There were reports that they had come from Bohemia, and so the French called them Bohemians (and still do).

The gypsy life seemed gay and vagabondish and must have been attractive to those bound to heavy labor or dull routine. The term "Bohemian" therefore came to be applied to artists, writers, show people, and others living an unconventional and apparently vagabondish life. Bohemia came to be an imaginary story land of romance.

Well then, if Shakespeare wanted a land of pastoral innocence and delights, should he pick Sicily or Bohemia? -Bohemia, by all means.

> … tremor cordis.. .

The courtiers let the audience know that Leontes of Sicily and Polixenes of Bohemia were childhood friends and have close ties of affection. In the next scene, when the two kings come on stage themselves, this is made perfectly clear.

Polixenes has been away from home for nine months and pressing affairs must take him away. Leontes urges him strenuously to remain, and when Polixenes is adamant, the Sicilian host asks his Queen, Hermione, to join her pleas with his. She does, and after joyful badinage, Polixenes gives in.

Then, quite suddenly, without warning at all, a shadow falls over Leontes. He watches his gay Queen and the friend she is cajoling (at Leontes' own request) and he says in an aside:

> Too hot, too hot!
> To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.
> I have tremor cordis on me...

—Act I, scene ii, lines 108-10

An unnatural physical effect, a palpitation of the heart ("tremor cordis") has come over him. A sickness, an abnormality, makes of the genial host, without real cause, a jealous tyrant.

The sickness grows on itself. He wonders if he has been cuckolded (see page I-108) and is at once convinced he is. He seeks supporting opinion and consults his courtier, Camillo, who listens in horror and recognizes the situation as a mental illness:

> Good my lord, be cured
> Of this diseased opinion, and betimes,
> For 'tis most dangerous.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 296-98

> … sighted like the basilisk

Camillo's clear wisdom is greeted by Leontes with a howl of rage. The King makes it clear that if Camillo were a loyal subject he would poison Polixenes. Reluctantly, Camillo agrees to accept the direct order, provided the King will then offer no disgrace to his Queen.

By now, however, Polixenes notes that the warm friendship that had surrounded him but a short time ago has vanished and he is aware of an intensifying frigidity. He meets Camillo and questions him but Camillo can only speak evasively, and still in the metaphor of sickness:

> I cannot name the disease; and it is caught
> Of you, that yet are well.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 387-88

He is referring, of course, to the insane jealousy of which Polixenes is the unwitting and undeserved cause. Polixenes cannot understand and says:

> How caught of me? Make me not sighted
> like the basilisk. I have looked on
> thousands, who have sped the better
> By my regard, but killed none so.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 388-91

Another name for the basilisk is the cockatrice, a word that may have originated as a distortion of crocodile. The medieval European had little contact with crocodiles, though he had heard of them in connection with the distant Nile.

The crocodile, like the serpent, is a deadly reptile. It might almost be viewed as a gigantic, thick snake, with stubby legs. To Europeans, unfamiliar with the crocodile except by distant report, the snaky aspects of the creature could easily become dominant.

Once "cockatrice" is formed from "crocodile," the first syllable becomes suggestive, and the fevered imagination develops the thought that the monster originates in a cock's egg and is a creature with a snake's body and a cock's head.

The cockatrice is pictured as the ultimate snake. It kills not by a bite but merely by a look. Not merely its venom, but its very breath is fatal. Because the cockatrice is the most deadly snake and therefore the king of snakes, or because the cockscomb may be pictured as a crown, the cockatrice came to be called "basilisk" (from Greek words meaning "little king").

Camillo cannot resist Polixenes' pleadings for enlightenment. He advises the Bohemian King to flee at once. Since Camillo is now a traitor, saving the man he was ordered to kill, he must fly also. Together, they leave Sicily.

A sad tale's best.. .

Meanwhile, at the court, Mamilius, Leontes' little son, is having a pleasant time with the ladies in waiting. His mother, Hermione, it now turns out, is rather late in pregnancy. (Polixenes, remember, had been at the Sicilian court for nine months.)

The Queen asks her son for a story, and Mamilius says:

A sad tale's best for winter; I have one
Of sprites and goblins.

—Act II, scene i, lines 25-26

There's the reference that gives the play its title. The play is a sad

tale of death-but also of rebirth. For winter does not remain winter always, but is followed by the spring.

> … sacred Delphos…

The childish tale is interrupted by the arrival of the King and his courtiers. Leontes has learned of Polixenes' flight with Camillo and that is the last straw. He accuses Hermione of adultery and orders her to prison.

Neither her indignant and reasonable claims to innocence nor the shocked testimony of faith in her on the part of his own courtiers will turn Leontes in the slightest. His tyranny is in full course now.

But he will go this far-he will rely on divine assurance. He says:

> / have dispatched in post
> To sacred Delphos, to Apollo's temple,
> Cleomenes and Dion …

—Act II, scene i, lines 182-84

This more than anything else proves the play to be placed in ancient Greek times, when the oracle at Delphi *(not* Delphos) was in greatest repute.

The oracle, a very ancient one, was located on the Greek mainland about six miles north of the center of the Gulf of Corinth and seventy miles northwest of Athens. Its location was originally called Pytho and it contained a shrine to the earth goddess that was served by a priestess known as the Pythia. This priestess could serve as the medium through which the wishes and wisdom of the gods could be made known.

The oracle, along with the rest of Greece, was inundated by the Dorian invasion that followed after the Trojan War. When Greece began to climb out of the darkness in the eighth century b.c., Pytho had a new name, Delphi, and the nature of the shrine had changed. It served Apollo rather than the earth goddess.

Greek myths were devised to explain the change.

Those myths told that when the Titaness Latona (Leto) was about to give birth to children by Jupiter, the jealous Juno made her life miserable in a variety of ways. She sent a dragon or giant snake, named Python, to pursue her, for instance. Eventually Latona bore twin children, Apollo and Diana. Apollo made his way back to Pytho, where the Python made its home, and killed it. Apollo then took over

the shrine itself and gave it its new name (though the priestess remained the Pythia).

For centuries Delphi remained the most important and sacred of all the Greek oracles. It was beautified by gifts made to it by all the Greek cities and many foreign rulers. It served as a treasury in which people and cities kept their money for safekeeping, since no one would dare pollute the sacred shrine by theft.

On the other hand, there is also a place called Delos, a tiny island no larger than Manhattan's Central Park, located in the Aegean Sea about a hundred miles southeast of Athens.

It too is involved with the tale of Latona and her unborn children. Juno, who was persecuting Latona in every way possible, had forbidden any port of the earth on which the sun shone to receive her. Tiny Delos, however, was a floating island which Jupiter covered with waves so that the sun did not shine on it. There Apollo and Diana were born. Thereafter, Delos was fixed to the sea floor and never moved again.

As a result, Delos was as sacred to Apollo as Delphi was, and it was easy to confuse the two. Thus, one could imagine the oracle at Delphi to be located on the island of Delos, and speak of the combination as the "island of Delphos." Greene does this in *Pandosto* and Shakespeare carelessly follows him.

> … Dame Partlet. ..

In prison, Hermione is delivered of her child and it turns out to be a beautiful little girl. Paulina, the wife of the courtier Antigonus, is a bold woman with a sharp tongue. Passionately loyal to Hermione and uncaring for the consequences, she offers to take the child to Leontes in the hope that the sight of the babyish innocence might soften him.

With the child, Paulina forces her way into Leontes' presence. He won't look at the child and cries out impatiently to Antigonus:

> Give her the bastard,
> Thou dotard, thou art woman-tired, unroosted
> By thy Dame Partlet here.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 72-74

This refers to an extremely popular medieval cycle of animal stories, in which human failings are placed in animal guise, a device that dates back to Aesop in the Western tradition. The cycle is known

as a whole as "Reynard the Fox," for the fox is the rascal hero (much like Br'er Rabbit in the Uncle Remus stories).

The tales reached their final form about 1100 and grew so popular that some of the names of the animals entered the common language. Even more familiar than "Reynard" for fox is "Bruin" for bear, for instance.

"Dame Partlet" is the hen and Leontes is saying in angry, insulting tones that Paulina is an old biddy who has henpecked her foolish husband into giving up the roost; that is, the dominating position in the house.

Antigonus can scarcely deny it at that. When Leontes tells him he should be hanged for not quieting his wife, Antigonus says, resignedly:

> Hang all the husbands
> That cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself
> Hardly one subject.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 108-10

> "… of high treason…"

Leontes' madness continues in full course. He orders Antigonus to carry off the baby girl to some desert spot and leave it there to die.

The King then gets news that Cleomenes and Dion, the ambassadors to the Delphos, are returning, and he hastens to prepare a formal trial for the Queen. She is brought out of prison to face her indictment. The officer of the court reads it out:

> "Hermione, Queen to the worthy Leontes,
> King of Sicilia, thou art here accused and arraigned
> of high treason, in committing adultery with
> Polixenes, King of Bohemia, and conspiring with
> Camillo to take away the life of our sovereign lord the
> King, thy royal husband. ..

—Act III, scene ii, lines 12-17

There must have seemed a strange familiarity in this scene to Englishmen, for scarcely three quarters of a century before, not one but two English queens had stood accused of a very similar charge.

These were two of the six wives of Henry VIII (who had died in 1547, seventeen years before Shakespeare's birth). One was Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife, tried for adultery in 1536, and the other was Catherine Howard, his fifth wife, tried for adultery in 1542. Both were convicted and beheaded, the former at the age of twenty-nine and the latter at the age of about twenty-two.

> The Emperor of Russia…

Again Hermione defends herself with dignity and sincerity, carrying conviction to all but the insane Leontes. While she waits for the word of the oracle, she says:

> The Emperor of Russia was my father.
> Oh that he were alive, and here beholding
> His daughter's trial!

—Act III, scene ii, lines 117-19

Russia was not, of course, in existence in the time when Sicily was under Greek domination. The Russian people first swam into the light of history in the ninth century when Viking adventurers from Sweden took over the rule of the land and established a loose congeries of principalities under the vague overlordship of Kiev. This "Kievan Russia" was destroyed in 1240 by the Mongol invasion.

A century before Shakespeare's birth, however, Russia was beginning to emerge from the Mongol night. In 1462 Ivan III ("the Great") became Grand Prince of Muscovy. He managed to annex the lands of Novgorod, a northern city, which controlled the sparsely settled lands up to the Arctic Ocean. This first gave Muscovy a broad realm, larger in terms of area than that of any other nation in Europe. With that, Muscovy became Russia.

In 1472 Ivan married the heir to the recently defunct Byzantine Empire and laid claim to the title of Emperor.

His successors, Basil III and Ivan IV ("the Terrible"), continued the policy of expansion. Ivan IV, who reigned from 1533 to 1584 (through Shakespeare's youth, in other words), defeated the remnant of the Mongols and extended the Russian realm to the Caspian Sea.

Not only did Ivan the Terrible's victories put Russia "on the map," but during his reign England gained personal knowledge of the land. In 1553 an English trade mission under Richard Chancellor reached Ivan's court, so that Shakespeare's reference to "The Emperor of

Russia" was rather topical.

"Hermione is chaste …"

Cleomenes and Dion now bring in the sealed message from Delphos. It is opened and read. It states:

"Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless,
Camillo a true sub ject, Leontes a jealous tyrant,
his innocent babe truly begot ten, and the
King shall live without an heir,
if that which is lost be not found"

—Act III, scene ii, lines 130-33

This is clear, straightforward, and dramatic-and lacks all resemblance to the kind of oracles actually handed out by the real Delphi. In fiction, oracles may interpret present and foretell future with faultless vision; in actual fact, they can do nothing of the sort.

The real oracle at Delphi was extremely practiced at giving out ambiguous statements that could be interpreted as correct no matter what the eventuality. The most famous example of this (though by no means the only one) took place in 546 b.c. when Croesus of Lydia, in western Asia Minor, was considering a preventive attack on the growing Persian kingdom to the east of the Halys River, Lydia's boundary.

Croesus consulted the oracle at Delphi, of which he was one of the most munificent patrons. He was told: "When Croesus passes over the river Halys, he will overthrow the strength of an empire."

Croesus attacked at once, and realized too late that the oracle was carefully phrased so as to remain true whether he won or lost. He lost and it was his own realm that was overthrown. It is for reasons such as this that "Delphic" and "oracular" have come to mean "evasive," "ambiguous," "double-meaning."

Apollo, pardon

And still Leontes does not give in. Like Pharaoh in the Bible, his heart hardens with each new thrust and he dismisses the statement of the oracle as falsehood.

But at this very moment a servant rushes in to say that Leontes'

young son, Mamilius, ill since his mother was arrested, has died. At the news, Hermione faints and Paulina declares she is dying.

The King is stricken. The death of his son at the instant of his blasphemy against Apollo punishes that blasphemy and demonstrates the truth of the oracle ("the King shall live without an heir") simultaneously.

As suddenly as the disease of jealousy had seized upon him, it leaves him. In one moment, he is sane again, and cries out in heartbreak:

> Apollo, pardon
> My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle.
>
> —Act III, scene ii, lines 150-51

He is anxious now to undo all he has done, but he cannot bring Mamilius back to life, he cannot unkill the Queen, he cannot find the child he has ordered exposed. He is doomed to live in endless remorse until "that which is lost" be found.

He can only bow his racked body before the harsh and indignant vituperation of Paulina.

> … The deserts of Bohemia

But what of Antigonus and the little baby girl he had been ordered to expose?

In *Pandosto* the child is given to sailors by the Bohemian King. These take her to the sea and expose her in a boat during a storm. The boat, carrying the child, is carried to the seacoast of Sicily.

But Shakespeare has reversed the kingdoms. It is the Sicilian King, Leontes, who hands out the girl to be exposed. If the reversal is to continue, the ship must land on the seacoast of Bohemia, rather than that of Sicily, and so it does. Act III, scene iii has its scene set on "Bohemia, the seacoast."

The trouble with this is that while Sicily has a seacoast on every side, Bohemia-the real Bohemia-both in our day and in Shakespeare's is an inland realm and has no seacoast. It is, in fact, two hundred miles from the closest seacoast, at Trieste (nowadays part of Italy).

Shakespeare must have known this, of course, but what difference does it make, when Bohemia is not a real land at all, but is the Bohemia of idyll, and may have a seacoast just as well as it may have anything else?

Of course, if we want to be literal, there was a time when the real Bohemia had a seacoast. It was at the height of its power under the reign of Ottokar II ("the Great"), who ruled from 1253 to 1278. In 1269, at a time when the Holy Roman Empire was going through a period of weakness, Ottokar conquered what is now Austria and ruled over an enlarged Bohemia that stretched over much of central Europe, right down to the head of the Adriatic Sea. For four years, then (before the Holy Roman Empire regained these lost lands), and four years *only,* from 1269 to 1273, Bohemia had a seacoast in the neighborhood of modern Trieste.

The ship carrying Antigonus and the baby reaches land and Antigonus says to the sailors:

> Thou art perfect then our ship hath touched upon
> The deserts of Bohemia?

—Act III, scene iii, lines 1-2

By "deserts" Antigonus merely means an unoccupied region. If we are not contented with Bohemia as an imaginary kingdom but insist on the real one, we can pretend that Bohemia has its mid-thirteenth-century boundaries and that the ship has landed near Trieste. This is not bad. It would mean that Antigonus traveled from Sicily, through the length of the Adriatic Sea, a distance of some seven hundred miles.

Antigonus has seen Hermione in a dream and she has bidden him name the little girl Perdita ("the lost one"). He puts the baby down together with identifying materials, in case she should happen to be found and brought up. But even as he makes his way back to the ship, he encounters a bear and there follows the most unusual direction in Shakespeare's plays, for it reads "Exit, pursued by a bear."

> … things new born

As Antigonus leaves, an old Shepherd and then his son come on the scene. The son is referred to in the cast of characters as "Clown," but in its original meaning of "country bumpkin."

The Clown has seen the ship destroyed by a storm and Antigonus eaten by the bear, but the Shepherd has found Perdita and says to his son:

> Now bless thyself; thou met'st with things dying,
> I with things new bom.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 112-13

It is the turning point of the play. Until now, the theme of the play has been a kind of dying, as Leontes went insane and drove person after person into flight, exile, or death. But the winter's tale is over and the spring begins, for Perdita the pretty child will not die. She has been found by the Bohemian shepherds and she will live.

… slide o'er sixteen years…

There comes a huge lapse of time between Act III and Act IV. The lapse is necessary and also occurs in *Pandosto,* which has as its secondary title *The Triumph of Time.*

This is a particularly radical violation of the "unities." There were three of these, according to the prescription in Aristotle's *Poetics.* There was the unity of time, since the entire action of a play should take no more than twenty-four hours; of place, since the entire action should be in one place; and action, since every incident in the play should contribute to the plot and there should be no irrelevancies.

These classical unities were taken up by the French dramatists of the seventeenth century, when France was the cultural leader of Europe.

Shakespeare could adhere to the unities if he chose (he did so, almost entirely, in *The Comedy of Errors)* but he felt no compulsion about it. His plays veered widely from place to place and covered events that took up the course of years. His plays had plots and subplots and occasional total irrelevancies. For this, he was sneered at by the classicists, who considered his plays to be crude, formless, and barbaric, though not without a kind of primitive vigor.

We don't think so at all nowadays. The observance of the unities can go along with great power in the hand of a genius. (No one can fault Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* which observes them rigorously.) On the other hand, in the hand of anyone less than a genius, the unities almost force tedium on a play, as they make it necessary to report action at an earlier time and a different place entirely through reports, so that all the play consists of one character explaining to another (for the benefit of the audience) what has happened or what is happening.

Shakespeare let time and place flash across the stage and by piling scene upon scene with spatial and temporal jumps lent his plays such a whirlwind speed that an audience could not help but be enraptured with action that never stopped and never allowed them to

catch their breath.

Yet even Shakespeare must have felt that at this point in *The Winter's Tale* he might be going a little too far. (He had done much the same in *Pericles,* see page I-195, which he had written a year or two earlier.) He brings in Time as a kind of chorus, opening the Fourth Act, explaining the lapse of time and apologizing for it too:

> Impute it not a crime
> To me, or my swift passage, that I slide
> O'er sixteen years…

—Act IV, scene i, lines 4-6

> … Florizel I now name to you. ..

Time mentions one specific involved in the passing of years-the existence of a son of Polixenes. He had been casually mentioned early in the play, but he is now named for the first time. Time says:

> I mentioned a son o'th'King's, which Florizel
> I now name to you...

—Act IV, scene i, lines 22-23

We can suspect, if we have the slightest experience with romances, that Florizel will fall in love with the grown-up Perdita, so that a king's son will woo a *girl* who is (to all appearances) a shepherd's daughter.

This happens, of course, and "Florizel" became the epitome of the "Prince Charming," the handsome man who comes to sweep the poverty-stricken young girl out of her cottage and into the palace. Heaven only knows how many marriages have been ruined because real life could not fulfill the dreams of romance-fed girls.

To at least one actual woman there was a kind of literal fulfillment. In the early 1780s an actress named Mary Robinson was wooed by a rather dissipated young man, who called her Perdita and himself Florizel in the letters he sent her. He happened to be the Prince of Wales, the eldest son of King George III of England. He later became Prince Regent during his father's madness and King George IV in 1820 upon his father's death.

He never married Miss Robinson, of course, and he was a poor excuse for a Florizel anyway, except for his rank, as he became fatter, grosser, and more dissipated with each successive year. He was a most unlovable man and very unpopular with his subjects.

> … named me Autolycus…

But we are in mythical Bohemia now, where Polixenes, grown older, is as virtuous as he ever was and still cherishes the good Camillo. Camillo longs to see Sicily again, for the repentant Leontes calls for him. Polixenes will not release him, however, and suggests instead that they find out why Prince Florizel haunts a certain shepherd's cottage.

But Bohemia contains more than virtue. Striding onstage is a peddler, singing happily. He makes his living by being a petty thief and confidence man. He says:

> My father named me
> Autolycus, who being, as I am, littered under
> Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 24-26

Mercury (Hermes) was the god of thieves. It was appropriate, therefore, that there be myths involving a description of the clever thefts carried through by the god.

Thus, almost immediately after he was born, Mercury killed a tortoise, made the first lyre out of it, and used that to sing a lullaby that put his mother, the nymph Maia, to sleep. Freed of her supervision he went out into the world, found a herd of fifty cattle belonging to Apollo, and stole them, placing improvised shoes on their feet to confuse the tracks and forcing them to walk backward to make them seem to have gone in the opposite direction.

The furious Apollo found them at last and saw through Mercury's defense of being an innocent babe. Mercury could only placate him by giving Apollo the lyre.

Mercury, incidentally, was the patron god not only of thieves but of merchants as well, which indicates the rather mixed opinion that the ancients had of merchants-possibly with some justice.

A son of Mercury was Autolycus, who, like his father, was a master thief. He could steal cattle undetectably and helped himself to the herds of Sisyphus. As Sisyphus watched his herds melt away, he

found himself suspecting Autolycus without being able to obtain proof. He therefore made markings on the soles of his cattle's hoofs and eventually found Autolycus in possession of cattle on whose hoofs were marked "Stolen from Sisyphus."

Autolycus' daughter married Laertes of Ithaca and their son was none other than Ulysses (see page I-92), who was the epitome of all that was shrewd and clever.

The peddler Autolycus in the play glories in his name and what that signifies and has a chance to demonstrate it at once. The Clown comes along, on his way to buy things for the great sheepshearing festival that is about to take place. Autolycus promptly pretends to have been robbed and beaten by a rogue, and the kindly Clown, helping him, has his pocket picked as a reward.

… but Flora

Back at the shepherd's cottage, Perdita, now a beautiful girl of sixteen, is the mistress of the feast and is dressed accordingly. Prince Florizel, overcome by her beauty, says to her:

> These your unusual weeds to each part of you
> Do give a life; no shepherdess, but Flora,
> Peering in April's front.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 1-3

Flora was the Roman goddess of flowers and the spring. Her festival was celebrated at the end of April and the beginning of May.

… the green Neptune

But Perdita is very nervous. Florizel stumbled upon her father's house when pursuing an escaped falcon and has fallen in love with her. Now he is attending the feast dressed as a shepherd and calling himself Doricles. Perdita fears his father the King will find him out and be furious. But Florizel says that even the gods stooped to low appearances for love:

> Jupiter
> Became a bull, and bellowed; the green Neptune
> A ram, and bleated; and the fire-robed god,

Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain,
As I seem now.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 27-31

Jupiter (Zeus) fell in love with Europa, a princess of Phoenicia. To win her, he turned himself into a snow-white bull and joined the Tyrian herd. Europa saw the new bull and was fascinated by it. It proved so gentle, she climbed on its shoulders at last, whereupon it ambled to the sea, plunged in, and swam westward. It arrived at Crete (a tidy swim of 550 miles) and there he eventually had three sons by her.

As for Neptune (Poseidon), called "green" because he was god of the sea, he loved Theophane. To steal her away from her other suitors, he turned her into a ewe and himself into a ram. Their offspring was a golden ram which, after death, yielded the famous Golden Fleece for which Jason adventured.

Apollo (called "fire-robed" and "golden" because he was god of the sun) had once offended Jupiter by killing the Cyclops, who forged the lightning which served as Jupiter's spears. Apollo was condemned to serve a Thessalian king, Admetus, as shepherd for punishment. Admetus treated the temporarily demoted god with every consideration, and in return, Apollo, still in shepherd's disguise, helped Admetus accomplish certain difficult tasks required for the winning of the beautiful Alcestis.

… Dis's wagon

Perdita's fears are well based, for Polixenes and Camillo do indeed come to the sheepshearing festival to spy on Florizel/Doricles' doings. They are greeted warmly by the unsuspecting Perdita in her role as hostess, and appropriate flowers are handed out. Perdita bemoans the lack of spring flowers that she might give the young ladies and says:

O Proserpina,
For the flow'rs now, that, frighted, thou let'st fall
From Dis's wagon.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 116-18

Dis (Hades) had abducted Proserpina while she was picking flowers in the fields of central Sicily (see page I-7). She dropped those flowers as she was carried, shrieking, into the underworld.

… Cytherea's breath

Perdita describes some of these flowers, saying, for instance:

… violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath;

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 120-22

Cytherea is an alternate name for Venus (Aphrodite). It comes from the island of Cythera off the southeast tip of the Greek mainland. On that island, as in Paphos (see page I-15), Venus had a well-known temple. Some versions of Venus' birth state that she rose from the sea, and, of course, some place the point of the rising near Paphos and some near Cythera.

… a tawdry-lace …

The disguised Polixenes and Camillo can't help but be taken by the pretty and sweet Perdita. The shepherds and shepherdesses dance; gaiety expands; and suddenly Autolycus appears at the door as a singing peddler and ballad seller.

The Clown, who is in love with Mopsa, a shepherdess, wants to buy her something, but he has reneged on previous promises and Mopsa says to him impatiently:

Come, you promised me a tawdry-lace,
and a pair of sweet gloves.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 250-51

The expression "tawdry-lace" has a rather complicated background. It dates back to Anglo-Saxon England, much of which in the seventh century was still pagan. Egfrith, King of Northumbria, had a wife named Etheldreda, who listened with interest to Christian

missionaries. She became a nun and established a religious community on land in her father's kingdom of East Anglia, becoming its first abbess in 673.

Etheldreda was eventually sainted and her name day, October 17, was celebrated at the site of the convent with a large fair, which drew crowds of the peasantry. With time, the Anglo-Saxon name of the saint was shortened to Audrey, so that it was the Fair of Saint Audrey that was celebrated.

At these fairs there was a brisk sale of souvenirs (as in modern fairs), and, in particular, cheap jewelry and showy lace could be bought-nothing really valuable, but strong on garish colors and elaborate frills. By further slurring the name of Saint Audrey, one came to speak of "tawdry lace," for instance, in connection with a cheap and showy specimen of that material. As a consequence, "tawdry" has now come to refer to anything of low quality that is cheap and tasteless.

> … than Deucalion…

Ballads are talked of and a dance of satyrs is presented. It is all pas-torally delightful, but Polixenes and Camillo, still in disguise, grow less and less happy. They encourage the disguised Florizel (who does not recognize them) to tell his love. He does so, in complete abandon, and is willing to pledge betrothal to Perdita on the spot, and before witnesses, a deed that is equivalent to marriage.

Polixenes asks Florizel if he has a father who might attend the wedding. Florizel admits he has but says flatly that his father must remain ignorant of this. At that, Polixenes, in a passion, strips off his disguise. He threatens the Shepherd with death, and Perdita with mutilation to mar her beauty. He says further that if his son ever as much as thinks of Perdita again-

> … we'll bar thee from succession;
> Not hold thee of our blood, no not our kin,
> Farre [farther] than Deucalion off.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 433-35

Deucalion was a legendary ruler of southern Thessaly, and might be termed the Greek Noah. Zeus had sent a great flood over the earth to wipe out the human race, but Deucalion (warned by his father, the Titan Prometheus) built an ark in which he and his wife, Pyrrha, rode

out the flood, coming to rest on Mount Parnassus after it was over.

They then prayed that mankind might be renewed and were told by a divine voice to turn their heads away and throw the bones of their mother behind them. The two reasoned that Mother Earth was meant. Turning their heads away they threw stones over their shoulder. The stones Deucalion threw became men and those Pyrrha threw women.

In this way the race of men and women could trace their descent to Deucalion and Pyrrha, and all men were related to at least the extent of being common descendants of Deucalion-except that Polixenes was going to deny Florizel even that much if he disobeyed.

> … make for Sicilia

Polixenes leaves, but Florizel is not disturbed. He intends to marry Per-dita even if it means losing his kingdom. Camillo, much impressed by Perdita and longing to see his own country, now plans to do for Florizel what sixteen years before he had done for Florizel's father-help him escape and go with him. Florizel has prepared a ship for the escape and Camillo says, earnestly:

> … make for Sicilia,
> And there present yourself and your fair princess
> (For so I see she must be) 'fore Leontes.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 547-49

To get Florizel as far as the ship, Camillo disguises him in different fashion by making him change clothes with Autolycus, who now comes on the scene glorying in the success of his ballad selling and pocket picking.

The Shepherd and his son, the Clown, having been threatened with death by the King, are meanwhile in a state of abject terror. The Clown urges his father to reveal the fact that Perdita is not really a relative by showing the relics that had been found with her. In this way, the Shepherd and the Clown, proving not to be related to the real criminal *in* this matter of the enchantment of the prince, might escape punishment.

Autolycus overhears this and (in Florizel's clothes) pretends he is a courtier and easily cons the poor bumpkins into coming with him. He decides to bring them to Florizel on a gamble that this may bring him advancement.

Great Alexander …

For the last act the scene shifts back to Sicily, where Leontes' life is one long, wretched repentance. His courtiers are urging him to marry again, for the land is without an heir and the perils of civil war loom.

Paulina, however, the wife of old Antigonus, who had been eaten by a bear, is against it. The oracle from "Delphos" had predicted that the King would remain without an heir till "that which is lost" be found. Paulina considers this to mean the long-ago-exposed girl. She says to Leontes:

> Care not for issue,
> The crown will find an heir. Great Alexander
> Left his to th'worthiest: so his successor
> Was like to be the best.

—Act V, scene i, lines 46-49

Actually, this was a poor analogy. When Alexander the Great died suddenly in 323 b.c. (about two generations *after* the time of Dionysius of Syracuse, at which time I have arbitrarily placed the action of this play) at the age of thirty-three, he left behind a termagant mother, a foreign wife, a mentally retarded half brother, a half sister, and an unborn child. Not one could serve as a successor and the natural choice would therefore have rested among the very capable generals who had been trained by Alexander and his father, Philip.

Alexander might have chosen any one of the generals and his dying vote might have fixed that general in the throne and brought about the consolidation of the new and gigantic Macedonian Empire, changing the history of the world. Unfortunately, Alexander (for whatever reason) is supposed to have said, with his last breath, "To the strongest" when asked to whom he left his Empire.

If there had been a strongest, that would have been well, but there wasn't. No one general was strong enough to defeat and dominate all the rest. The result was that for thirty years a civil war raged among the generals. At the end, Alexander's Empire was worn out and fragmented. The fragments continued to war against each other with the result that within three centuries of Alexander's death, the eastern half of his Empire was retaken by native tribes and the western half was taken by Rome.

Surely this is not the fate for Sicily that Paulina was urging on Leontes.

In fact, she has other plans. She urges Leontes to vow never to marry anyone not chosen by herself. Leontes, who can never punish himself sufficiently, agrees.

> … from Libya

Florizel is now introduced, arriving in Sicily with Perdita. Leontes greets the young man tearfully and inquires, with wonder, of the beautiful Perdita. Florizel, attempting to mask the truth as deeply as possible, says:

> Good my lord,
> She came from Libya.

—Act V, scene i, lines 156-57

Libya was the name given by the ancient Greeks to the entire north African coast west of Egypt. The two chief cities of Libya in the time of Dionysius of Syracuse were Cyrene, a Greek city five hundred miles to the southeast of Sicily, and Carthage, a non-Greek city, a hundred miles to the southwest.

> … Julio Romano…

Events hasten now. Even while Florizel is embroidering his lie by making Perdita the daughter of a Libyan king, news arrives that Polixenes and Camillo are in Sicily. Polixenes sends a message demanding the arrest of Florizel.

However, the audience need not be alarmed. It is at once revealed that the Shepherd and the Clown are also in Sicily and they can reveal the truth of Perdita's identity.

What happens next is offstage. We would think that there should be a grand reconciliation scene as Perdita is shown to be Leontes' daughter, and there is, but not onstage. We learn of it only through a discussion among three Gentlemen.

This is odd and we might speculate that in the original form of the play the recognition and restoration of Perdita was the climax. Perhaps this ending turned out to be weak-after all, a very similar climax had been used only a year or two before by Shakespeare in

Pericles (see page I-199). Pressure might have been applied to Shakespeare to make some alteration in that ending.

As a result, Shakespeare thrust Perdita's recognition offstage and prepared an even more dramatic scene involving Queen Hermione.

Paulina had reported her dead in Act III, and there has been no hint since that the report was wrong. Indeed, at the end of Act III, when An-tigonus is taking the little baby girl off to exposure, he dreams that Hermione's ghost appears to him, and this would make it seem that Shakespeare really did consider her dead.

Shakespeare, in his revision (assuming there was one), did not trouble to go back and put in some indication of Hermione's remaining alive, nor does he expunge the reference to the ghost, which is useful in explaining the name "Perdita."

Instead, he begins at this late date in the fifth act to start preparing the audience. The Third Gentleman mentions, for the first time, a statue:

> … the Princess, hearing of her mother's statue,
> which is in the keeping of Paulina-a piece many years
> in doing and now newly performed
> by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano …

—Act V, scene ii, lines 101-5

Julio Romano was a real Italian artist, known for his painting rather than for his sculpture, who had died in 1546, a little over half a century before *The Winter's Tale* was written. This is a startling anachronism, of course.

The Second Gentleman adds another vital item in the new build-up. Concerning Paulina, he says:

> she hath privately, twice or thrice a day,
> ever since the death of Hermione,
> visited that removed house.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 113-15

Of course, the statue turns out to be the living Hermione after all. Why she has been kept from the so repentant King for sixteen years and been condemned to a life of solitary imprisonment; why Paulina has undertaken the backbreaking task of feeding and caring for her

and keeping the secret; why the King has not had curiosity to see the progress of the statue during all the "many years" in which it was being made-these points are not explained. All this lack of explanation lends substance to the theory that the last half of the fifth act is a new ending, patched on imperfectly.

There is the final reconciliation scene and all ends in happiness. Paulina (who has now learned of her husband's death) marries Camillo, and even the Shepherd and the Clown now find themselves enriched, so that Au-tolycus, swearing to reform, is taken under their protection.

7. The Comedy Of Errors

The comedy of errors may possibly be the very first play Shakespeare wrote, perhaps even as early as 1589.

It is a complete farce, and it is adapted from a play named *Menaechmi,* written by the Roman playwright Titus Maccius Plautus about 220 b.c. If we assume that the events in Plautus' play reflect the time in which it was written (although Plautus borrowed the plot from a still earlier Greek play) we can place the time a century and a half after that of Dionysius of Syracuse. It is for that reason I place this play immediately after *The Winter's Tale.*

Plautus' play *Menaechmi* tells of the comic misadventures of twin brothers separated at birth. One searches for the other and when he reaches the town in which the second dwells, finds himself greeted by strangers who seem to know him. There are constant mistakes and cross-purposes, to the confusion of everyone on the stage and to the delight of everyone in the audience.

Shakespeare makes the confusion all the more intense by giving the twin brothers each a servant, with the servants twins as well. The developments are all accident, all implausible, and-if well done-all funny.

Merchant of Syracusa.. .

The play begins seriously enough in Ephesus. Solinus, Duke of Ephesus, appears onstage, with Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse. The title "Duke of Ephesus" is as anachronistic as "Duke of Athens" (see page I-18) and with even less excuse, since there never was a Duchy of Ephesus in medieval times as there was, at least, a Duchy of Athens.

There is hard feeling between Ephesus and Syracuse, to the point where natives of one are liable to execution if caught in the territory of the other. The Syracusan, Egeon, caught in Ephesian territory, stands in danger of this cruel law. The Duke says, obdurately:

Merchant of Syracusa, plead no more;
I am not partial to infringe our laws.

—Act I, scene i, lines 3-4

In the time of Plautus, the Greek city-states were as logically the

scene of romantic comedy as were the Italian city-states in Shakespeare's own time. In both cases, the city-states were in decline but lingered in a golden afterglow.

Syracuse was no longer as great as it had been under Dionysius. It lived rather in the shadow of the growing Roman power, with which it had allied itself in 270 b.c.

In the course of the Second Punic War, fought in Plautus' middle age, Rome looked, for a while, as though it were going to lose, when the Carthaginian general Hannibal inflicted three spectacular defeats upon it between 218 and 216 b.c. Syracuse hastily switched to the Carthaginian side in order to be with the winner, but this proved to be a poor move.

Rome retained sufficient strength to lay siege to Syracuse and, after more than two years of warfare, took and sacked it in 212 b.c. Syracuse lost its independence forever. Plautus may have written *Menaechmi* in the last decade of Syracusan independence, but even if he wrote after its fall, it is not hard to imagine him as seeing it still as the important city-state it had been for the past five centuries.

For the other city, Plautus did not use Ephesus (as Shakespeare does) but he could have. Ephesus is a city on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor. Asia Minor fell under the control of various Macedonian generals after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 b.c., but individual cities flourished and retained considerable powers of local self-government. Indeed, Ephesus, in Plautus' lifetime, was geographically part of the kingdom of Pergamum, which made up the western third of the peninsula of Asia Minor. The city was at the very peak of its wealth and its commercial prosperity.

Of course, neither was in a position to carry on petty feuds with each other, and there is no historical basis for the opening situation in the play-but that is just to get the story moving.

> To Epidamnum.. .

Duke Solinus points out that the penalty for being caught in Ephesian territory is a thousand marks. In default of payment of the fine, Egeon must be executed.

Egeon seems to think death will be a relief and the curious Duke asks why. Egeon sighs and begins his tale. In Syracuse, he had married a woman he loved:

> With her I lived in joy, our wealth increased
> By prosperous voyages I often made
> To Epidamnum…

—Act I, scene i, lines 38-41

Epidamnum (or Epidamnus) was a Greek city-state on what is now the coast of Albania; on the site, indeed, of Durres, Albania's chief port.

Epidamnum is, actually, the other city used by Plautus, in place of Shakespeare's Ephesus, and in a way it is more suitable. Epidamnum is three hundred miles northeast of Syracuse; Ephesus twice as far; and one might suppose that the nearer neighbors two cities are, the more likely they are to quarrel.

Epidamnum became Roman in 229 b.c., so that Plautus was writing the play not long after the end of the city's independence.

Why did Shakespeare switch from Epidamnum to Ephesus? Perhaps because Ephesus was far more familiar to Christians. Two centuries after Plautus' death it became one of the centers of the very early Christian church. One of the letters in the New Testament attributed to St. Paul is the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Of Corinth…

At one point, though, Egeon had had to make a long stay at Epidamnum, and after six months his wife followed him there, although she was nearly at the point of giving birth. In Epidamnum she was delivered of twin sons in an inn where a lowborn woman was also being delivered of twin sons. Egeon bought the lowborn twins as slaves for his own sons.

They then made ready to return home, but were caught in a bad storm not far off Epidamnum. When the ship was deserted by its crew, Egeon's wife tied one child and one servant child to a small mast and Egeon tied the other child and the other servant child to another mast. For security, they tied themselves to masts as well and waited for the ship to be driven to land.

What's more, rescue seemed close:

The seas waxed calm, and we discovered
Two ships from jar, making amain to us;
Of Corinth that, of Epidaurus this.

—Act I, scene i, lines 91-93

Corinth was located on the narrow isthmus that connected the

Peloponnesus to the rest of Greece. This favored position gave it a footing that placed it on the sea, looking east toward Asia Minor and also looking west toward Italy. Throughout Greece's history it remained one of its most important cities and one of its most prosperous parts. In Plautus' lifetime it was the wealthiest city in Greece. That prosperity was destroyed for a century when Roman forces, for inadequate reasons, sacked it in 146 b.c., a generation after Plautus' death.

Epidaurus was a Greek city-state on the eastern shores of the Peloponnesus, only twenty-five miles from Corinth. It would spoil the effect of the story to have two ships come from such closely spaced cities.

Fortunately, there is another Epidaurus (or, in this case, Epidaurum), which is located on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, some 130 miles up the coast from Epidamnum. That gives us our picture. The wrecked ship, not far from Epidamnum, is being approached by a ship from Epidaurus, sailing from the north, and by another ship from Corinth, sailing from the south.

Before the rescuers can reach the ship on which Egeon and his family are adrift, that ship hits a rock and is split in two. Egeon, with one son and servant child, is picked up by the ship from Epidaurus; his wife, with the other son and servant child, is picked up by the ship from Corinth. The two ships separate and the family is permanently split in two.

> … farthest Greece

Egeon and his half of the family return to Syracuse, but the other half of the family has proceeded to some destination unknown to him and he never hears of them again.

Egeon's son and his servant, once grown, want to try to find their twins. They leave on the search, and after they are gone for a period of time, Egeon sets out in his turn to find them:

> Five summers have 1 spent in farthest Greece,
> Roaming clean through the bounds of Asia,
> And coasting homeward, came to Ephesus,

—Act I, scene i, lines 132-34

"Greece" had a broader meaning in ancient times than it has today, and "Asia" a narrower one. Greece (or "Hellas" as the Greeks, or

Hellenes, themselves called it) was the collection of the thousand cities of Greek-speaking people, whether those cities were located on the Greek peninsula proper or elsewhere. From Massilia (the modern Marseilles) on the west, to Seleucia on the Tigris River on the east, all is "Greece." Egeon had thus been searching not just Greece proper but wherever the Greek tongue was spoken.

As for Asia, this term was applied in Roman times (and in the New Testament, for instance) not to the entire Asian continent in the modern sense, but to the western half of Asia Minor only, the territory of the kingdom of Pergamum actually. Egeon, scouring Asia Minor, would naturally return to Syracuse by way of Ephesus, the largest city of the region.

The Duke is affected by the sad story, but insists that it is either a thousand marks or death.

> … stay there, Dromio…

Egeon and his listeners get off the stage and now the coincidences begin, for his son and servant, the very ones for whom he is searching, have just landed in Ephesus; while his wife and other son and servant, for whom the first son and servant are searching, have been in Ephesus all the time. The entire family is in the same city and no one guesses it till the very end of the play, although that is the obvious and only way of explaining the extraordinary things that are to happen.

Indeed, everyone is extraordinarily obtuse, for the merchant who has brought the Syracusan son to Ephesus warns him:

> Therefore, give out you are of Epidamnum,
> Lest that your goods too soon be confiscate.
> This very day a Syracusian merchant
> Is apprehended for arrival here,

—Act I, scene ii, lines 1-4

Does the son ask who this Syracusian (a countryman, after all) might be? No, for if he does, the plot is ruined. The events can only follow if no character in the play ever sees the plainest point, and the audience must co-operate and accept the obtuseness for the sake of its own pleasure.

The son has a supply of money with him which he orders his servant to deposit for safekeeping at the inn where they are to stay:

Go bear it to the Centaur, where we host,
And stay there, Dromio, till I come to thee;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 9-10

It is stated by Egeon, but not explained, that both servants bore the same name. This is necessary since even if the twins' faces were alike, the confusion could only be complete if their names were alike too. This identity in names passes the bounds of the credible, yet it must be accepted or else all must be given up.

The servants are both named Dromio, which comes from a Greek word meaning "racecourse." It is appropriate, for all through the play each servant is sent racing, now on this errand, now on that, usually coming to grief, for they are forever meeting not their master but their master's twin, without realizing it.

As for the masters, they are both named Antipholus, from Greek words meaning "opposed in balance." They are so alike, in other words, that if each were placed on the opposite end of a balance, the balance would remain unmoved.

In order to identify them in the play, the masters have to be called "Antipholus of Syracuse" and "Antipholus of Ephesus." The servants are "Dromio of Syracuse" and "Dromio of Ephesus."

It is Antipholus of Syracuse who sends Dromio of Syracuse to the Centaur.

.. .as I am a Christian.. .

Dromio of Syracuse runs off and Antipholus of Syracuse explains to the merchant that he is in search of his mother and twin brother. Suddenly Dromio of Ephesus races on the scene. His master, Antipholus of Ephesus, is a married man and dinner at home is waiting for him. Dromio of Ephesus sees Antipholus of Syracuse and begs him to come home.

Antipholus of Syracuse naturally wants to know what home and what dinner Dromio is talking about and why he hasn't stayed at the Centaur and what happened to the money. Just as naturally, Dromio of Ephesus wants to know what money.

Now here is Antipholus of Syracuse madly searching for a twin brother with a twin-brother servant, and here comes what seems to be his servant who obviously is talking about an utterly inappropriate set of events. Ought not Antipholus of Syracuse instantly suspect it as his servant's twin brother mistaking him for his own twin brother?

Not at all. The thought never occurs to Antipholus of Syracuse (or to Dromio of Syracuse) for an instant, even though these cross-purposes multiply. (Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus are more to be excused. They are not consciously looking for their twins and so they are mentally unprepared to consider the twins' existence as explanation for the errors.)

As the cross-purposes continue (and they require each set of twins to wear identical costumes, if any further multiplication of implausibility is required), Antipholus of Syracuse cries out:

> Now, as I am a Christian, answer me,
> In what safe place you have bestowed my money;
> Or I shall break that merry sconce of yours

—Act I, scene ii, lines 77-79

Here, certainly, we depart from Plautus, in whose lifetime Christianity had not yet arisen. -And since Dromio of Ephesus can give no satisfaction, he is beaten.

> … war against her heir

The cross-purposes continue and grow worse. Antipholus of Syracuse hastens to the Centaur, finds his money safe there, and calculates it was impossible to have seen Dromio when he had seen him. (Does he suspect? Not on your life!)

In comes Dromio of Syracuse and Antipholus of Syracuse asks him if he has recovered his senses. Dromio of Syracuse naturally doesn't know what he is talking about and denies that he ever denied he had the gold. So he is beaten too. (The Dromios are constantly being beaten for no fault of their own.)

In comes Adriana, the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, and the wife's sister, Luciana. They accost Antipholus of Syracuse and demand he come home to dinner with them. Antipholus of Syracuse is flabbergasted and suspects witchcraft (he suspects anything and everything but the obvious fact that his twin brother is involved), yet eventually accompanies the two women.

Now, at last, Antipholus of Ephesus appears on the scene, ordering a necklace from a Merchant for his wife. He is further complaining that Dromio of Ephesus (who is with him) is telling some ridiculous story about himself denying that he is married.

Antipholus of Ephesus invites the Merchant home for dinner and

when they reach his house they find the doors barred. Voices within insist that Antipholus of Ephesus is an imposter, for the master of the house is within and at dinner. Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse even engage in conversation (with a closed door between) and suspect nothing.

Antipholus of Ephesus, in high rage, thinking his wife is entertaining some lover, decides to take the necklace and give it to a courtesan rather than to his wife.

Indoors, meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse is attracted to Luciana, the wife's sister, and she, embarrassed, urges him to be sweet and kind to his wife instead. When she leaves, Dromio of Syracuse enters and tells his master that a fat cook claims him as her husband.

The two of them, Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse, begin a satirical (and to our modern ears, cruel) catalogue of the charms of the lady.

Dromio of Syracuse says she is as spherical as a globe and that countries could be located on her. Antipholus of Syracuse begins to test this, in Shakespeare-contemporary manner, all thought of the supposedly Greek background forgotten. Thus he inquires about Ireland and America, though neither was known in Plautus' time.

The answer to one of the questions offers a possible way of dating the play. Antipholus of Syracuse asks about the location of France on the cook's body and Dromio replies:

> In her forehead, armed and reverted,
> making war against her heir.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 126-27

The reference must be to Henry IV, who in 1589 had become King of France on the death of his second cousin, Henry III. However, Henry IV was a Protestant and Catholic France (in particular, Catholic Paris) would not accept him. For several years France made "war against her heir."

Henry IV won an important victory at Ivry in 1590 and then in 1593 abjured Protestantism and accepted Catholicism. Between his victory and his repentance, enough of the Catholic opposition was won over to end the war. Since Dromio of Syracuse makes it sound as though the revolt is continuing, one can suppose that *The Comedy of Errors* was written no later than 1593 and no earlier than 1589.

> … the mermaid's song

Antipholus of Syracuse continues to suppose that witchcraft is at work and decides to get out of Ephesus on the first ship. He sends Dromio of Syracuse to locate such a ship.

Antipholus dislikes the woman who claims to be his wife and feels a strong attraction to her sister, which, he suspects, is a specific result of enchantment. He feels he must not give in to all this:

> But, lest myself be guilty to self-wrong,
> I'll stop mine ears against the mermaid's song.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 168-69

Here is another example of a reference to the dangerous singing of the mermaids or sirens (see page I-12).

> … in Tartar limbo…

The cross-purposes continue. The Merchant from whom Antipholus of Ephesus has ordered a chain meets Antipholus of Syracuse and forces it on him, refusing to take money at the moment, saying he will take it at suppertime. Antipholus of Syracuse plans to be gone from the city by suppertime but the Merchant will not listen.

However, the Merchant unexpectedly encounters a creditor of his own and decides to get the money sooner. This time it is Antipholus of Ephesus he meets, coming from the courtesan's place with Dromio of Ephesus.

This Antipholus sends his servant to buy a rope, with which he intends to chastise his wife and servants for locking him out of the house.

The Merchant asks for his money and Antipholus of Ephesus denies receiving the chain. The Merchant is so enraged at this denial that he calls in the police and demands that Antipholus of Ephesus be arrested.

It is at this point that Dromio of Syracuse arrives with the news that he has located a ship leaving Ephesus. Antipholus of Ephesus knows nothing about a ship and Dromio of Syracuse knows nothing about a rope. Antipholus of Ephesus has no time, however, to worry about this particular cross-purpose. He needs bail and he sends Dromio of Syracuse to his wife's place to get the money.

In delivering the message, Dromio of Syracuse explains to Adriana that his master is in trouble:

… he's in Tartar limbo, worse than hell:

—Act IV, scene ii, line 32

The Greek notion of the afterlife in Hades was a rather gray one. It was a place of shadows where the shades of men and women remained in weakness and forgetfulness; where they suffered no torture but experienced no joy.

Beneath this colorless Hades was Tartarus (see page I-13), which helped inspire later Christian theologians with their notion of hell. In place of the mild Hades itself, Christians imagined a region called limbo at the border of hell. This receives its name from the Latin word for "border" and, like Hades, is a gray place of no punishment and no hope.

We might say, then, that in the Christian sense, hell is worse than limbo, while in the Greek sense, Tartarus is worse than Hades. To say, as Dromio does, that "Tartar limbo" is "worse than hell" is a queer mixture of terms that probably tickled an audience more aware of these theological and classical distinctions than moderns are.

… Lapland sorcerers …

Antipholus of Syracuse, still waiting for news of a ship, still impatient to be gone, marvels at how everyone seems to know him and think highly of him.

Sure, these are but imaginary wiles,
And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 10-11

Lapland is an ill-defined area making up the Arctic regions of Scandinavia and northwestern Russia, inhabited by Lapps, who are the Old World equivalent of the New World Eskimos. They might easily be confused, in Shakespeare's time, with the Finns of Finland, for Lapps and Finns are similar in race and language.

The comment of Antipholus of Syracuse would seem to refer to Finland rather than Lapland, for Finnish mythology is unusual in the emphasis it places on song and magic. Their heroes are magicians rather than strong men, Merlin rather than Hercules. The most famous

Finnish literary work is their national epic, the *Kalevala,* which is pre-Christian in inspiration and the hero of which is the singing magician Wainamoinen.

Satan, avoid,..

The apparent enchantments continue. Dromio of Syracuse comes panting in with the money given him by Adriana to bail Antipholus of Ephesus. Dromio of Syracuse hands it to Antipholus of Syracuse, who naturally doesn't know what it is. He asks about the ship instead and Dromio of Syracuse insists he has already given him that news.

In comes the courtesan to whom Antipholus of Ephesus has promised the chain. She sees it around the neck of Antipholus of Syracuse and asks for it. Antipholus answers violently:

Satan, avoid! I charge thee, tempt me not!

—Act IV, scene iii, line 49

The harassed Antipholus of Syracuse, already convinced he is the victim of witchcraft, is sure that the light wench is the devil himself come to tempt him to sin. The exclamation is a form of Jesus' reproof to Satan on the occasion of the temptation in the wilderness. Jesus is then quoted as saying "Get thee hence, Satan" (Matthew 4:10).

(When Shakespeare quotes the Bible, he cannot very well quote the exact wording of the King James version with which we ourselves are so familiar. That version was not published till 1611, some twenty years after *The Comedy of Errors* was written and nearly at the close of Shakespeare's writing career.)

The courtesan naturally decides he is mad and goes off to warn his wife.

… the kitchen vestal. ..

Meanwhile, Antipholus of Ephesus is still waiting for the bail which Dromio of Syracuse delivered to Antipholus of Syracuse. In comes Dromio of Ephesus with the rope that *he* had been sent for just before Antipholus of Ephesus had been arrested. Naturally he gets beaten.

Adriana and Luciana arrive now with the courtesan. With them they bring a schoolmaster, Mr. Pinch, whom they hope is wise enough

to cure Antipholus of Ephesus of his madness. Antipholus of Ephesus, to whom it seems the rest of the world is mad, is driven to distraction by this.

He insists that, despite his wife's protestations, he had been barred from his own house at dinner. He calls on Dromio of Ephesus to confirm this and for once master and man are on the same side. When Antipholus of Ephesus points out that the very kitchenmaid railed at him, Dromio of Ephesus says:

> Certes, she did; the kitchen vestal scorned you.
>
> —Act IV, scene iv, line 76

The vestals were the Vestal Virgins (see page I-33) but this can scarcely be taken to mean that the kitchenmaid was a virgin. In Shakespeare's time, this was scarcely likely if she was over twelve. Apparently it is only a comically high-flown way of saying that she was in charge of the fire, as the vestals were in charge of the sacred fire.

> … Circe's cup

But there is further trouble. Antipholus of Ephesus still wants to know where the bail money is and Luciana says she sent it. Dromio of Ephesus denies that he received it or that he was even sent for it, and Antipholus of Ephesus, in his rage, begins to act mad indeed. He and Dromio of Ephesus are seized and dragged away.

In come Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse on their way to the waterfront. The Merchant, who has just had Antipholus of Ephesus arrested, sees him apparently at liberty, with the chain for which he was arrested openly around his neck. There is a fight and Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse escape into a nearby abbey. The Abbess emerges and refuses to let anyone else enter.

But the day is coming to a close. (This play and *The Tempest* are the only two plays in which Shakespeare kept the action within the bounds of a single day in accordance with the Greek "unities"-see page I-158.) Egeon is being led to his death, since he has not been able to raise the thousand marks he has been fined. Adriana seizes the opportunity to accost the Duke of Ephesus and beg him to persuade the Abbess to release her poor, mad husband.

But Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus have escaped from their own jailers and have come furiously on the scene.

Antipholus of Ephesus demands justice against his wife, who, he claims, is conspiring to imprison him after having barred him from his own house.

The Duke, listening to the babble of confusing testimony from all sides, says:

> Why, what an intricate impeach is this!
> I think you all have drunk of Circe's cup.

—Act V, scene i, lines 270-71

Circe is the name of a sorceress who appears in the *Odyssey*. She lived on a Mediterranean island and had visitors drink wine from her cup. The drink would turn them into animals, who were then enslaved by her.

Ulysses' men, in the course of their return from fallen Troy, come to Circe's island, drink from her cup, and are changed into swine. Ulysses himself, with the help of an antidote supplied him by Mercury, overcomes her.

The Duke, by this reference to Circe's cup, implies that all about him have lost their ability to reason but are as confused as senseless beasts.

Egeon interrupts to say the man seeking redress is his son Antipholus. But it is Antipholus of Ephesus he indicates and that Antipholus at once denies any knowledge of Egeon. The Duke backs him up, saying he has known Antipholus of Ephesus all his life and that Antipholus has never been in Syracuse. (The Duke is as dull as the rest; he doesn't catch on either.)

It is only when the Abbess emerges with Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse, and the two Antipholuses and Dromios face each other, that all is clear at last. The Abbess turns out, of course, to be Egeon's wife.

All the conflicting events of the day are sorted out; Egeon is liberated; and the play ends in utter happiness. It is even clear that Antipholus of Syracuse will marry Luciana so that the two brothers will also be brothers-in-law.

8. Pericles, Prince of Tyre

The date of this play is usually given as 1608, and the last three acts are characteristically late Shakespearean in style. The first two acts are, however, considered much inferior, and many critics feel that, except for a touch here and there, they were not written by Shakespeare.

Whether that is so or not, the play, as it stands, is included in the collections of Shakespeare's plays and, for better or worse, will forever bear his name.

> … ancient Gower…

The play begins with an Introduction. An old man comes on stage and says:

> To sing a song that old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come,

—Act I, Introduction, lines 1-2

John Gower was a fourteenth-century English poet (c. 1330-1408) and a friend and contemporary of Chaucer's (see page I-54). Gower was considered by his contemporaries, though not by moderns, to have been almost Chaucer's equal, and though it might be thought they would have borne each other the ill will of competitors, they did not. They dedicated books to each other.

One of Gower's principal works is *Confessio Amantis (Confession of a Lover),* first published in 1383. In this work, a number of romances are told in English couplets. The tales are by no means original with Gower. What he does is retell stories from ancient and medieval sources, choosing the most popular ones.

In the eighth book of *Confessio Amantis* Gower tells a tale, taken from a Greek source, of which a version is presented in this play. A prose version of the same story, "The Pattern of Painful Adventures," was published in 1576 by Laurence Twine. Some scenes in *Pericles* are drawn from Twine, but Gower is the major influence.

It is only in this play and in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (see page I-54) that Shakespeare so openly announces his source.

> … Antiochus the great

Gower lays the scene of the play:

> This Antioch, then; Antiochus the great
> Built up this city for his chiefest seat,
> The fairest in all Syria-

—Act I, Introduction, lines 17-19

This alone tells us that the time in which the tale is supposed to take place is in the Hellenistic period; that is, in the couple of centuries that followed the death of Alexander the Great. In this period, Greek-language monarchies were established in Egypt and western Asia.

The largest of these was established south and east of Asia Minor in 321 b.c. by Seleucus I, who had been one of Alexander's generals. The realm is, in his honor, usually called the Seleucid Empire in the histories.

Seleucus had made his first capital in ancient Babylon, but quickly abandoned it as too alien and un-Greek. In its place, he constructed Seleucia on the Tigris, about twenty miles north of Babylon. It became a thoroughly Greek city.

Although the Empire covered vast tracts of what are now the nations of Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, the portion most under the influence of Greek culture and therefore most valued by the Greek-speaking and Greek-cultured descendants of Seleucus was the westernmost part, commonly called Syria by the Greeks.

In Syria Seleucus founded a city which served as his western capital and named it Antiocheia, after his father, Antiochus. In English, we know it as Antioch. It was located fifteen miles from the sea, near the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, and is now located in southwestern Turkey.

About a century and three quarters after the founding of the Seleucid Empire, almost all the eastern provinces had fallen away and come under the rule of native princes. What was left of the Greek kingdom was concentrated in the westernmost provinces and what had been the Seleucid Empire came more and more to be called simply Syria.

Despite the vicissitudes of the Empire, however, Antioch continued to grow and became a great metropolis. In the days of the Roman Empire, when Rome had finally absorbed the last remnant of the Seleucid realm, Antioch was the third largest city of the Empire.

Only Rome itself and Alexandria in Egypt were larger.

The question is, now, which monarch is referred to by Gower as "Antiochus the great"? It is no use to try to decide by the actual events of the play, since these are all fictitious.

There were thirteen monarchs of the Seleucid kingdom named Antiochus, but one of them, the third of the name, did call himself Antiochus the Great. This Antiochus III ruled from 223 to 187 b.c. In the first part of his reign, he brought back into the Seleucid fold (very temporarily) some of the large eastern provinces that were breaking away, marching through the east almost like another Alexander in doing so. It was this which gave him the idea of calling himself "the Great."

Once that was accomplished, he attempted to annex Egypt, which was governed by a boy king at the time, and also Asia Minor. Had he succeeded, he would have united almost all of Alexander's Empire under his rule.

Unfortunately for himself, Antiochus HI fell afoul of the rising power of Rome. Challenging that Western nation, he invaded Greece, but was defeated there in 191 b.c. The Romans followed him into Asia Minor and defeated him again in 190 B.C. Antiochus ended his reign in defeat and failure.

Considering that in *Pericles* Antiochus the Great is pictured as ruling in magnificence and glory (at least at the beginning), we might arbitrarily place the fictitious events of this play about 200 b.c. This is twenty years after the suggested time of *A Comedy of Errors* and so *Pericles* becomes the eighth and last of Shakespeare's Greek plays.

> … her to incest…

Gower goes on to explain that "Antiochus the great" was left a widower with a beautiful daughter:

> With whom the father liking took,
> And her to incest did provoke.

—Act I, Introduction, lines 25-26

Incest is treated here as a horrible and unspeakable crime, and so it is considered in most societies; though, it must be admitted, not in all. The Egyptian Pharaohs routinely married their sisters, feeling perhaps that only their sisters had blood aristocratic enough to make a marriage suitable. (Or perhaps it was a relic of matrilineal descent; of

the times when the nature of fatherhood was not understood and when property could only be inherited through the mother. By marrying his sister, the Pharaoh could make sure that the sister's son, who later was to inherit the throne, would also be his own.)

After the death of Alexander the Great, one of his generals, Ptolemy, seized Egypt and established the "Ptolemaic kingdom." For nearly three centuries Egypt was ruled by his descendants, all of whom were named Ptolemy. The Ptolemies carefully adhered to Egyptian customs in order to remain popular with their subjects. Ptolemy II took for his second wife, for instance, his full sister, Arsinoe. As a result, first she, and then he, received the surname Philadelphus ("sibling lover"). He did not have children by her. Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt (see page I-318), was married in turn to two of her brothers, though each marriage was purely formal, for both were children at the time of the marriage.

Furthermore, in the Persian dominions in the days before Alexander's conquest, nicest was not abhorred and father-daughter unions were allowed. Antiochus the Great ruled over most of the core of the old Persian Empire. It is not on record that he followed Persian custom in this respect, but that old custom may have been in the mind of the anonymous Greek writer who first invented the tale which worked its way down the centuries and came to rest in Shakespeare's *Pericles.*

> … Prince of Tyre. ..

To keep his luscious daughter from the princely suitors that sought her hand, Antiochus forced all to attempt to solve a riddle. Failure to solve the riddle was punished with death and numerous suitors had already suffered that penalty.

The play itself begins before the palace at Antioch, where a young suitor has come to present himself for the hand of the princess. Antiochus says:

> Young Prince of Tyre, you have at large received
> The danger of the task you undertake.

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

Tyre is a city on the Mediterranean coast, about 220 miles south of Antioch. It is much the more ancient of the two cities, for it was a flourishing town in the thirteenth century b.c. when the ancient

Egyptian Empire was at its height.

Tyre was an important port of the Canaanites, who were called Phoenicians by the Greeks. Its ships ventured far through the Mediterranean, founding what eventually became the still greater city of Carthage on the north African shore. Tyrian ships even ventured outside the Mediterranean, reaching Britain on the north and, as one tale has it, circumnavigating the African continent to the south.

Tyre's stronghold was on a rocky island off the shore and this, combined with her navy, kept her secure against the land-based empires of Asia. She maintained her independence not only against David's Israelite Empire but against the much more dangerous Assyrian and Chaldean empires. Nebuchadrezzar subjected it to a thirteen-year siege from 587 to 574 b.c. and managed only a partial victory.

The real end of Tyre's independence came in 332 b.c., when one much greater than Nebuchadrezzar banged against its gates. This was Alexander the Great himself. He had been sweeping through Asia Minor with scarcely any resistance and was now heading toward Egypt, when Tyre unexpectedly refused to yield. Even Alexander required seven full months to take Tyre, and when he completed the job, he was vengeful enough to have ten thousand of its citizens executed and another thirty thousand sold into slavery.

Although Tyre recovered to some extent, it remained only a shadow of its former self, first under the Ptolemies of Egypt, then under the Seleucid Empire, and finally under the Roman Empire.

It was in 198 b.c., just about the suggested time of the events of this play, that Antiochus the Great wrested the southern part of Syria from Egypt.

Tyre vanished from the view of western Europe after the breakup of the Roman Empire, but reappeared in the time of the Crusades. The Crusaders captured it in 1124 and for over a century it remained one of the chief cities of the Christian "Kingdom of Jerusalem." When the Crusaders were finally driven out of the East, Tyre was destroyed. A small village, still bearing the old name, exists on its site now, in southern Lebanon.

The original Greek version of the story of *Pericles* is lost, but a Latin prose romance based on that Greek version exists. It begins with the incest and riddle of Antiochus, and the young man who comes to win the princess is "Apollonius of Tyre." The "of Tyre" merely means he was born there, or lives there. To make him *Prince* of Tyre is an anachronism, for Tyre did not have independent rulers in Hellenistic times.

Shakespeare did not use the name Apollonius. He was influenced, apparently, by a character in *Arcadia,* a romance written in 1580 by

Sir Philip Sidney, which had as one of its heroes a character named Pyrocles. Pyrocles' nobility was something like that which Shakespeare had in mind for his own hero, and, perhaps for that reason, he used the name, converting it to the more common Greek form of Pericles.

The only important historical Pericles was the leader of democratic Athens from 460 to 429 b.c. Under him, Athens was at the height of its power and culture and his rule may be taken as coinciding with the Golden Age of Greece. It must be emphasized, though, that the Pericles of Shakespeare's play has nothing whatever to do with Pericles of Golden Age Athens.

… this fair Hesperides

Pericles declares himself aware of the danger of wooing Antiochus' daughter, and she is brought out before him-a vision of loveliness. Antiochus says:

> Before thee stands this fair Hesperides,
> With golden fruit, but dangerous to be touched;
> For deathlike dragons here affright thee hard.

—Act I, scene i, lines 28-30

This is a reference to the eleventh of the twelve labors which Hercules was supposed to undergo in the Greek myths. The Hesperides are so named from a Greek word meaning "west." They were the three daughters of Hesperus, the Evening Star (which always appears in the west after sunset), according to one version of the myth. Another version has them the daughters of the Titan Atlas, who gave his name to the Atlantic Ocean and who was associated with what was, to the Greeks, the Far West.

On the far western section of the north African coast there was supposed to be a garden containing a tree bearing golden apples (oranges, I wonder?), which was guarded by an ever watchful dragon. Hercules achieved this task, as he did all others, but Antiochus seems to doubt that Pericles can do the equivalent.

… to Tharsus

Antiochus presents the riddle Pericles must solve. It is a silly

riddle and quite transparent. Pericles sees the answer at once and is horrified. He carefully hints at the truth and Antiochus is, in his turn, horrified.

Pericles sees that to have solved the riddle is as dangerous as to have missed it and leaves hurriedly for Tyre. Antiochus sends a servant after the young prince to poison him.

Even at Tyre, Pericles is uneasy. He is not far enough from Antioch and he feels that Antiochus will come against him with an army and bring misery on the whole city. (And well he might, for in actual history, Tyre became part of Antiochus' dominions in 198 b.c.)

Pericles tells his loyal lord, Helicanus, the story and says he intends to go into exile:

> Tyre, I now look from thee then, and to
> Tharsus Intend my travel…

—Act I, scene ii, lines 115-16

No city named Tharsus is to be found in the gazetteers.

The name is very similar to Tarsus, an important city on the southern coast of Asia Minor, best known to us as the place where Antony and Cleopatra first met (see page I-343) a century and a half after the time of Pericles, and where St. Paul was born a few decades later still.

Tarsus, however, is only about 170 miles west of Antioch and was as firmly in the Seleucid grip as was Tyre itself. It is interesting to wonder if perhaps Tharsus is a distortion of Thasos, a small island in the northern Aegean Sea. There are places in the play where Thasos would fit well.- However, it is most likely that Tharsus is a completely fictitious place, no more to be located on the map than the Bohemia of *The Winter's Tale* (see page I-156).

> … the Trojan horse …

Pericles leaves Tyre just in time to escape Antiochus' poisoning emissary, but he finds matters in Tharsus not well. Its governor, Cleon, and his wife, Dionyza, bewail the fact that the prosperous city has been reduced by a two-year famine to a point of near cannibalism. Even as they are wailing, a fleet of ships appears on the horizon. At first they suspect it is an enemy come to take advantage of their weakness, but it is the noble Pericles. He enters with his attendants and says:

… these our ships you happily [i.e., perhaps] may think
Are like the Trojan horse [which] was stuffed within
With bloody veins expecting overthrow,
Are stored with corn to make your needy bread,

—Act I, scene iv, lines 91-94

The Trojan horse was the final stratagem of the Greeks, who after ten years' siege of Troy (see page I-89) had abandoned hope of conquest by direct attack. The climactic scene of the war is not described in Homer's *Iliad* or in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida.* It is, however, described in Vergil's *Aeneid.*

The Greeks built a giant hollow horse, filled it with their best warriors, then pretended to abandon the siege and sail away. The Trojans were easily convinced that the horse was an offering to Minerva (Athena) and that it was a good luck token which, if accepted, would forever protect the city against conquest. It was accordingly taken into the city and that night the Greek warriors emerged and opened the gates to the remainder of the army (which had secretly returned). Then began the bloody task of sacking the city.

Pericles' ships, however, were not filled with warriors, but with food.

… our country of Greece…

Gower emerges at the beginning of the Second Act to explain that Pericles is treated with great honor at Tharsus but that word comes to him from Tyre that Antiochus is indeed anxious to have him killed and that even Tharsus will not be safe.

Pericles therefore takes to the sea again and this time is wrecked. He is washed on shore all alone, all his companions and goods gone.

The Second Act opens, then, on the shore of the Pentapolis, which apparently is where Pericles has been washed up. He approaches some fishermen, asking their help for pity, pointing out that he has never had to beg before. The First Fisherman replies sardonically:

No, friend, cannot you beg?
Here's them in our country of Greece
gets more with begging than we can do with working.

—Act II, scene i, lines 67-69

The Pentapolis ("five cities") is a district on the north African shore about 550 miles west of Alexandria and 950 miles southwest of Antioch. The chief of the five cities was Cyrene, and the region is still called Cy-renaica today. It is the northeasternmost section of the modern nation of Libya and was much in the news in 1941 and 1942, when the British and Germans were fighting back and forth across it in the Desert War.

Obviously, the Pentapolis is not in Greece in the modern sense, where that is specifically the land occupying the southernmost portion of the Balkan peninsula. Yet Shakespeare, or whoever wrote this scene, was (perhaps unknowingly) not really incorrect in the wider sense of Greece as including any area where Greek language and culture was dominant (see page I-172).

A knight of Sparta. ..

The ruler of Pentapolis is Simonides, and his daughter, Thaisa, is having a birthday the next day. Various knights are to fight at a tournament in her honor (a queer intermingling of medieval custom with the ancient background).

Pericles no sooner hears this than fishermen come in dragging a suit of armor which has entangled their nets in the sea. It is Pericles' own armor, lost in the shipwreck. Now he too can join the tournament and engage in a second type of contest for the beautiful daughter of a king.

Simonides and Thaisa appear in the next scene, seated in a pavilion in the fashion of medieval sponsors of a tournament. The competing knights pass by, presenting their shields with the identifying device on each.

Thaisa describes the first for her father:
A knight of Sparta, my renowned father;
And the device he bears upon his shield
Is a black Ethiop reaching at the sun.
The word, Lux tua vita mihi.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 18-21

Sparta was at one time the leading military city of Greece, but in 371 b.c., nearly two centuries before the apparent time of the play, it

had been catastrophically defeated by Thebes at the Battle of Leuctra. From that time on, Sparta sat paralyzed, refusing to change with the times, and never admitted it was no longer the leader of Greece. In 200 b.c. it was in its last stages of independence and still produced good fighters.

There is nothing impossible, then, in the appearance of a Spartan in the competition, although he could scarcely be a "knight" in the medieval sense. Nor is it at all likely that he would have a Latin motto ("Thy light is life to me") on his shield, since in the time of Antiochus the Great, Latin was, to the cultivated Greeks, a barbarous and uncouth native Italian dialect, nothing more.

> A prince of Macedon…

The second knight is described by Thaisa as:

> A prince of Macedon, my royal father;
> And the device he bears upon his shield
> Is an armed knight that's conquered by a lady;
> The motto thus, in Spanish, Piu per dolcessa che per forza.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 24-27

Macedon was a kingdom on the northwest shore of the Aegean Sea, Greek in language and culture, but backward in the time of Athens' Golden Age, and playing little part in Greek history at the time.

It rose to prominence in 359 b.c. when a remarkable man, Philip II, began his period of rule over it. Under his guidance, it came to dominate Greece, and under his son, Alexander the Great, it conquered the Persian Empire.

Macedon was greatly weakened by the conquest, in point of fact, as most of its soldiers and best citizens departed forever to rule over distant areas in Asia and Africa. It suffered also from barbarian invasions in the third century b.c. Nevertheless, Macedon managed to maintain control over the entire Balkan peninsula, including Greece proper. In 200 b.c., however, it stood at the brink of downfall, for war with Rome was beginning and this war Macedon was eventually to lose utterly.

It is not inappropriate that a Macedonian should be represented here, but what is he doing with a motto "in Spanish," a language which did not yet exist and would not for nearly a thousand years?

(The Signet Shakespeare gives the motto in Italian, anyway, another language which did not yet exist. It means "More by gentleness than by force.")

> … a fire from heaven…

The third knight is from Antioch, the fourth and fifth are not identified geographically, and the sixth knight, in rusty, shabby armor, is Pericles. It is Pericles, of course, who wins the tournament, and Thaisa is much taken with his handsome appearance. There is a gala celebration and it looks as though Pericles' luck has turned.

As for Antiochus, his luck has taken a final downturn. At Tyre, Heli-canus, who rules in Pericles' absence, tells what has happened. Apparently the gods are annoyed at Antiochus' incest and, as Helicanus says:

> Even in the height and pride of all his glory,
> When he was seated in a chariot
> Of an inestimable value, and
> His daughter with him, a fire from heaven came,
> And shriveled up their bodies, even to loathing.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 6-13

In actual history, Antiochus the Great did not die such a death. His defeat by Rome placed a heavy burden on him in the way of tribute. He tried to raise the money by forcing the priesthood to disgorge the treasures hoarded in their temples. He was supervising the stripping of such a temple when the populace, aroused by the priests, mobbed and killed him in 187 b.c.

A younger son of Antiochus III, Antiochus IV, ruled from 175 to 163 b.c., and he may well have contributed to the picture Shakespeare draws of "Antiochus the great." It was Antiochus IV who particularly beautified Antioch as the eastern provinces fell farther and farther away. It was Antiochus IV who made a name for himself in history as a king of intolerable wickedness, which also fits the picture in *Pericles.*

Antiochus IV, like his father, was browbeaten by Rome (not even daring to meet them in battle) and, partly out of chagrin at that, turned against those Jews of his kingdom who would not accept Greek culture. The Jews rose in bloody revolt and the tale of that revolt is told in the Books of Maccabees, which form part of the Apocrypha but are accepted in the Catholic version of the Bible.

Antiochus IV died of tuberculosis during a campaign in the eastern provinces. In the First Book of Maccabees (a sober historical account) his death is recounted undramatically, except that he is reported to have, in rather unlikely fashion, died regretting his actions against the Jews and recognizing that he was being punished for what he had done.

In the Second Book of Maccabees (a more emotional account, and filled with tales of martyrdom and miracles) Antiochus is supposed to have died in agony, swarming with worms and rotting away while still alive: "and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to all his army. And the man, that thought a little afore he could reach to the stars of heaven, no man could endure to carry for his intolerable stink" (2 Maccabees 9:9-10).

The death of Antiochus IV as reported in 2 Maccabees undoubtedly contributed to the death of Antiochus in *Pericles,* for Helicanus says that after Antiochus and his daughter had shriveled under the fire from heaven:

> … they so stunk
> That all those eyes adored them ere their fall
> Scorn now their hand should give them burial.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 11-13

> … make for Tharsus

Pericles' fortune continues to climb, for he marries Thaisa and then hears from Tyre that Antiochus is dead and that the Tyrians long for Pericles' return.

He and his now pregnant wife, Thaisa, go on board ship to return to Tyre. Once again a storm strikes and at its height Thaisa goes into labor and is delivered of a baby girl. She apparently dies in the process and the superstitious sailors will not have a corpse on board. They place her in a coffin and shove it overboard.

The battered ship is near Tharsus and Pericles feels they cannot make Tyre. He cries out:

> O make for Tharsus!
> There will I visit Clean, for the babe
> Cannot hold out to Tyrus.
> There I'll leave it
> At careful nursing

—Act III, scene i, lines 77-80

To go from the Pentapolis to Tyre and be driven by the storm toward Tharsus is within belief if it is really Tarsus that the name implies; but it is much less credible if Tharsus is Thasos.

… through Ephesus…

The scene now shifts to Ephesus and the home of Cerimon, a skillful doctor. A follower says to him:

> Your honor has through Ephesus poured forth
> Your charity, and hundreds call themselves
> Your creatures, who by you have been restored;

—Act III, scene ii, lines 43-45

Ephesus, the great and prosperous city of the time of *The Comedy of Errors,* is still great and prosperous in the time of *Pericles.*

This queen will live…

At this moment, servants enter with a chest that has been cast up from the sea. It is the casket containing Thaisa, along with a note from Pericles asking that if the dead body be found, it be piously buried.

But Cerimon is a skillful physician indeed. He says:

> This queen will live: nature awakes; a warmth
> Breathes out of her. She hath not been entranced
> Above five hours.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 94-96

If Tharsus were really Tarsus, this would be impossible. The Queen's body was consigned to the sea at a time when the ship was near Tharsus and to reach Ephesus would require it to drift westward the length of Asia Minor and then northward, half the length of the

Aegean coast of that peninsula-an about six-hundred-mile journey. To drift at 120 miles an hour is quite a picture.

On the other hand, suppose the storm had driven the ship to Thasos. From there to Ephesus would be only 250 miles, which would require a drift of 50 miles an hour.

But at Tharsus, Pericles asks when Tyre can be reached and a sailor says:

> By break of day, if the wind cease.

—Act HI, scene i, line 76

From Thasos to Tyre is more than a night's journey. So it's best to ignore geography. Tharsus cannot be placed anywhere on the map in such a way as to have a plausible relationship to Ephesus, Tyre, and Pentapolis, all three of which have positions that are known and fixed.

> And Aesculapius. ..

To restore Thaisa to life is, of course, an arduous task even for Cerimon, who ends by saying:

> And Aesculapius guide us!

—Act III, scene ii, line 112

Aesculapius (the Latin version of the Greek Asclepius) was, in Greek myth, a son of Apollo who was supremely skilled as a physician. So skillful was he that he could restore life to the dead. This enraged Hades, who apparently felt himself to be endangered by technological unemployment. He complained to Jupiter (Zeus), who solved matters by killing Aesculapius with a thunderbolt. After death, Aesculapius was raised to divine rank and became the god of medicine.

It is in his divine role that Cerimon appeals to him on this occasion.

> Marina.. .

At Tharsus Pericles is greeted warmly as the savior of the tune of the famine, but he cannot linger. He must go to Tyre, leaving behind:

My gentle babe,
Marina, who,
for she was born at sea,
I have named so.. .

—Act III, scene iii, lines 12-16

"Marina" is the feminine form of the Latin word meaning "of the sea." The baby is left in the care of Cleon and his wife Dionyza.

Diana's temple …

In Ephesus Thaisa is now fully recovered and, thinking that Pericles died in the shipwreck, says she will live in religious retreat. Cerimon, the doctor, says:

Madam, if this you purpose as ye speak,
Diana's temple is not distant far,
Where you may abide…

—Act III, scene iv, lines 11-13

Ephesus in ancient times was known for its temple to Diana (Artemis). An early version of this temple was completed about 420 b.c. and was impressive enough to be considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

In October 356 b.c. the temple was destroyed by fire and it proved to be a case of deliberate arson. When the culprit was captured, he was asked why he had done this deed. He replied that he did it in order that his name might live forever in history. He was executed and to defeat his desire it was ordered that his name be erased from all records and never be spoken. (However, the man had his wish after all, for a name purporting to be his survives somehow. It is Herostratus.)

This was a century and a half before the time of *Pericles,* but the temple was rebuilt, of course. Indeed, it is most famous to moderns because it plays a distant role in the New Testament, some two centuries after the time of *Pericles* and four centuries after Herostratus' crime.

St. Paul, in Ephesus on a missionary voyage, denounced idolatry

and roused the hostility of the silversmiths of the city, who did a roaring business in the manufacture of little religious objects for tourists who came to visit the temple of Diana. Not foreseeing the time when their successors would do equally well, if not better, with small crucifixes and statues of the Virgin Mary, the silversmiths were horrified at St. Paul's denunciation of idolatry. There were riots in the city and the crowd was "full of wrath and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts of the Apostles 19:28).

To be sure, Shakespeare knew Diana as the virgin goddess of the moon and the hunt (see page I-14), as she was in classical Greek mythology. The Diana of the Ephesians was another goddess altogether, a representation of fecundity, a fertility goddess with her chest covered by breasts, representing, perhaps, the nourishing earth. Diana's temple in Ephesus was surely not an appropriate life for a quiet existence, free from the sexual lusts of the world, but in the play it is taken as such.

> … dove of Paphos. ..

The fourth act once again opens with Gower, who covers this time a passage of fourteen years, during which Marina grows to young womanhood in Tharsus. (The actual length of the time is specified later, when Pericles refers to her as fourteen years old.)

This is very similar to *The Winter's Tale,* where another baby girl, Perdita, separated from her parents, also grows to young womanhood (see page I-158). In both cases the father of the young girl is a ruler and the mother is thought to be dead but isn't really.

One difference in the two plays is that Perdita grows up in *The Winter's Tale* to know only love and admiration, while Marina in *Pericles* is not so lucky.

Cleon and Dionyza have a daughter of their own named Philoten, who is completely overshadowed by Marina. Gower describes the hopelessness of Philoten's case:

> … so
> With dove of Paphos might the crow
> Vie feathers white.

—Act IV, Introduction, lines 31-33

The dove of Paphos (see page I-15) is one of those doves that draw Venus' chariot.

… rob Tellus…

Dionyza plots, out of jealousy, to have Marina murdered despite the great debt owed Pericles by Tharsus. Her vile plan is made the easier since Marina's nurse, who has been with her since her birth, has just died and Marina has lost a natural guardian. Indeed, Marina makes her first appearance in the play mourning her nurse's death. She is carrying a basket of flowers and speaks sadly at the grave of the dead woman:

> No, I will rob Tellus of her weed
> To strew thy green with flowers…

—Act IV, scene i, lines 13-14

Tellus is one of the names of the Roman goddess of the earth, Terra being the other, and more familiar, one.

… Mytilene is full.. .

Dionyza urges Marina to take a walk on the seashore with a man who has been ordered to murder her. Providentially, a band of pirates come ashore and seize Marina before she can be killed.

Marina's situation has not improved by much, however, for the scene shifts to a brothel in Mytilene where the pander in charge is having problems. He says to his men:

> Search the market narrowly!
> Mytilene is full of gallants.
> We lost too much money
> this mart by being too wenchless.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 3-5

Mytilene is the chief city on the island of Lesbos in the eastern Aegean. It is one of the larger Aegean islands and of the other places mentioned in the play it is nearest to Ephesus. It is only about a hundred miles northwest of Ephesus in a direct line, though the sea voyage would require working round a promontory of land and would

be longer.

It is, on the other hand, 150 miles southeast of Thasos and, if that island were "Tharsus," it would be easy to imagine the pirates making for Mytilene, which, as a sailors' haven, is apparently a good market for prostitution.

> The poor Transylvanian.. .

In rather revolting terms, the pander and a bawd continue to talk about the shortage of girls. The pander says:

> The poor Transylvanian is dead
> that lay with the little baggage.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 22-23

This is an indication that the few girls they have are riddled with disease. Of course, the use of the term "Transylvanian" is an anachronism. Transylvania is a region which now makes up the central portion of modern Romania, or, as it was known to the Romans, Dacia. The term "Transylvania" did not come into use until the twelfth century. It means "beyond the forests" and was first used by the Hungarians, from whose standpoint Transylvania was indeed a land beyond the forests.

It is to Mytilene that the pirates have brought Marina, and they sell her, still untouched (virgins bring high prices) to the brothel.

> The petty wrens of Tharsus…

At Tharsus Cleon is horrified at what Dionyza has done. She faces it out, however, and maintains that Pericles need never know. She wants to know if Cleon is:

> … one of those that thinks
> The petty wrens of Tharsus will fly hence
> And open this to Pericles.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 21-23

This is in line with the old superstition that birds will tell of

crimes, from which comes our own phrase "a little bird told me."

One possible source of the idea rests in a popular Greek tale concerning a poet, Ibycus, en route to Corinth, who was set upon by thieves and killed. As he was dying, he cried out to cranes passing overhead, urging them to tell the world of the crime.

The Corinthian populace was stunned and horrified at the death of the popular poet and the thieves were uneasy at the stir they had created. During the course of a play which they were watching along with the rest of the Corinthians, the Furies (spirits who avenge crimes) were presented in such horrid fashion that the thieves were terrified. And when, just at this moment, cranes happened to fly overhead, the distraught thieves cried, "The cranes of Ibycus! The cranes of Ibycus!" and gave themselves away.

Another possible source for the superstition rests in a verse in the Bible which says: "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" (Ecclesiastes 10:20). This can be interpreted as a warning that Icings and powerful men have spies and sycophants in plenty who are always ready to earn gratitude by accusing others of treasons. However, there is a temptation to take anything in the Bible literally and the notion of telltale birds entered the language.

Thetis, being proud.. .

It seems that Pericles' miseries are never done. Gower emerges yet again in the next scene to describe how Pericles comes to Tharsus to get his daughter (why the long delay?) and finds her dead, with a monument built to her in the market place; on which is an inscription that reads in part:

… at her birth Thetis, being proud,
swallowed some part o'th'earth

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 38-39

Thetis was a sea nymph whom Shakespeare here, as elsewhere (see page I-91), confuses with Tethys, a goddess of the sea.

… the god Priapus …

Meanwhile, the brothel at Mytilene is the scene of a new kind of trouble. Marina has been installed as one of the prostitutes, but she remains untouched. Those who approach her are quickly converted to virtue and leave with the determination to patronize brothels no more. The bawd is horrified, saying:

> Fie, fie upon her!
> She's able to freeze the god Priapus…

—Act IV, scene vi, lines 3-4

Priapus is a god of fertility, pictured as a dwarfish, ugly creature with a gigantic penis in a perpetual state of erection (whence our own medical term "priapism").

When Lysimachus, the governor of Mytilene, comes to the house, Marina quickly converts him too and sends him away virtuous. In despair, the pander and bawd hand Marina over to a servant to be deflowered, thinking that then she might become more amenable to their purposes. Marina, however, persuades him to make an effort to hire her out as a governess instead, capable of teaching many maidenly accomplishments.

> The music of the spheres …

Pericles' ship, returning from Tharsus to Tyre, passes by Mytilene. (If Tharsus is Tarsus, this is impossible. If Tharsus is Thasos, it is quite possible.)

The governor of Mytilene, Lysimachus, boards the ship and finds Pericles sitting there, speechless with grief. He is saddened by the sight and says that there is a girl in Mytilene who can console him. Marina is brought on board and, before long, it turns out that the two are father and daughter.

At the discovery, Pericles hears music the others cannot. He says:

> The music of the spheres! List, my Marina.

—Act V, scene i, line 232

This is a reference to a mystical Greek notion. The philosopher Pythagoras of Samos discovered that twanging cords with lengths

related to each other by small whole numbers emitted harmonious notes. It set him to thinking of the importance of numbers in the universe and he and his disciples evolved many odd beliefs based on numbers.

The Pythagoreans later developed the notion of the individual planets being set in spheres (see page I-25) at distances relative to each other such that they could emit harmonious notes. Perhaps at first this "music of the spheres" was considered metaphorically only, but eventually it was taken literally and came to mean a celestial sound that was far more beautiful than could be imagined on earth.

Pericles was finally being rewarded for having endured so much misfortune so patiently.

> … goddess argentine

At the sound of the music, Pericles falls asleep and in his sleep the goddess Diana appears to him. Pericles is ordered to go to the Ephesian temple, there to make known his story to the people. He wakes and says:

> Celestial Dian, goddess argentine,
> I will obey thee.. .

—Act V, scene i, lines 252-53

Diana (Artemis) is goddess of the moon, which is silver, rather than the sun's bright gold. The Latin word for silver is *argentum,* so that Diana as the silver goddess of the moon is the "goddess argentine."

The nation of Argentina was so named because the earliest explorers found the natives wearing silver ornaments. The river which they were exploring became the Rio de la Plata (Spanish for "Silver River"). The nation that grew up about that river as a nucleus became the Latinized version of the same idea, Argentina.

As a result, the term "goddess argentine" would nowadays be rather ambiguous.

In Ephesus Pericles discovers his wife Thaisa and so, after fourteen years, the family is reunited. It is left to Gower to explain that Marina will be married to Lysimachus and that Pericles visited vengeance on Cleon and Dionyza by returning to Tharsus and burning them in their palace.

Part II. Roman

9. The Rape Of Lucrece

Shakespeare wrote four plays and one narrative poem dealing with Roman history, real, legendary, or fictional. Of these, it is the poem, *The Rape of Lucrece, that* deals with the earliest event, the legendary fall of the Roman monarchy in 509 b.c.

If I were treating all Shakespeare's works in a single chronological grouping, *The Rape of Lucrece* would be placed between *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*. However, since I am segregating the Greek and Roman works, *The Rape of Lucrece* appears as the first of the Roman group.

The love…

The Rape of Lucrece was published about May 1594, a year after *Venus and Adonis*. This later poem is both longer and more serious than the earlier, and makes for harder reading too. Like the earlier poem, it is dedicated to Southampton (see page I-3), and the additional year seems to have increased the intimacy between Shakespeare and his young patron. At least the dedication begins:

The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end;

—Dedication

Lust-breathed Tarquin…

The first stanza of the poem plunges the story into action at once:

From the besieged Ardea all in post,
Borne by the trustless wings of false desire,
Lust-breathed Tarquin leaves the Roman host

—lines 1-3

The year, according to legend, is 509 b.c., and Rome is still no

more than a city-state. It had been founded about two and a half centuries before (753 b.c. is the traditional date) and has been governed by a line of kings. Ruling in the city now is the seventh king to sit on the Roman throne. His name is Lucius Tarquinius (better known in English as Tarquin) and he has been given the surname Superbus, meaning "proud," because of his arrogant tyranny.

Tarquin forced the senatorial aristocracy into submission by executing some on trumped-up charges and by refusing to replace those who died a natural death.

He kept himself in power by gathering an armed guard about himself, and ruled as a military despot. Nevertheless, he maintained a kind of popularity with the common people by a program of public works and by an aggressive foreign policy that brought in loot from surrounding tribes.

The aristocracy could only wait and hope that some particular event would take place to alienate the populace generally from the despotic monarch.

It is not, however, King Tarquin who is referred to in the third line of the poem, but his son, Tarquinius Sextus, the heir to the throne.

The Roman army is engaged in a war against the Volscians, a tribe who occupied territory just south of Rome. The Romans were at this time laying siege to Ardea, one of the Volscian cities, just twenty miles south of Rome, and it is from this siege that Tarquin Sextus is hurrying.

> … Lucrece the chaste

The incident Shakespeare is about to relate is to be found in the first book of the *History of Rome* by Titus Livius (better known as Livy to English-speaking people), and also in the *Fasti (Annals),* written by Shakespeare's favorite ancient writer, Ovid.

Despite the fact that the incident is taken from ancient writers, it is not at all likely that it is historically accurate. In 390 b.c., a little over a century after the time of Tarquin, Rome was taken and sacked by the barbarian Gauls and the historical records were destroyed. All of Roman history prior to 390 b.c. is a mass of legends based on uncertain kernels of fact.

The legends narrated by Livy and others were, however, accepted as sober fact right down to modern times, and certainly Shakespeare accepted this tale as such. He goes on for the remainder of the first verse to tell the reason for the prince's haste:

> And to Collatiun bears the lightless fire

Which, in pale embers hid, lurks to aspire
And girdle with embracing flames the waist
Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste.

—lines 4-6

Prince Tarquin has a cousin, also named Tarquin, whose estates are near Collatia (which Shakespeare calls "Collatium"), a small town ten miles east of Rome. He was therefore Tarquin of Collatia, or in Latin: Tarquinius Collatinus. In order to distinguish him from Tarquinius Superbus, the King, and from Tarquinius Sextus, the prince, he may be called simply Collatinus, or, in English, Collatine.

At the siege of Ardea (and a siege is usually a boring occupation) the Roman aristocrats, it seems, fell to discussing their wives, each boasting of the virtue and chastity of his own. This is the sort of thing one would scarcely think men would seriously do, yet it is common in romances. Shakespeare uses such a discussion as the mainspring of part of the action in *Cymbeline* (see page II-58), for instance.

In fact, the unreal romanticism of this discussion is part of what causes historians to suspect the account of the Rape of Lucrece to be a fable. It is very likely a tale made up long after Tarquin's reign to account for the establishment of the Republic; a historical romance, to begin with, later taken as sober history.

But, history or fiction, this is the tale. Of the Roman aristocrats, Collatine was most emphatic in maintaining the chastity and sobriety of his wife, Lucretia, a name of which Lucrece is a shortened version.

It came down to a wager eventually, and the Romans decided to leave the siege temporarily so that they might dash home to Rome to check on their wives' activities. Doing so, they found that all the wives but Lucrece were having a good time; dancing, laughing, gossiping, feasting. Lucrece, however, was at home, alone except for her maids, and was gravely engaged in the housewifely task of spuming.

Collatine had won his wager, but in a deeper sense, he had lost, for Prince Tarquin, having seen Lucrece's beauty and chastity, conceived a powerful desire to make love to her. Once all the aristocrats were back at the siege, he left again, this time alone, in order to gratify that desire.

… had Narcissus seen her …

Tarquin is not at ease. He is not an utterly abandoned villain and he feels the guilt and disgrace of the reprehensible thing he is doing-

yet he cannot help himself. After having arrived, he is treated as a welcome guest and Lucrece asks for news of her husband. Tarquin muses on her beauty and says to himself that, on hearing her husband was well

> … she smiled with so sweet a cheer
> That, had Narcissus seen her as she stood,
> Self-love had never drown'd him in the flood.

—lines 264-66

Narcissus is the young man in Greek myths who loved only himself, and drowned trying to kiss his reflection in water (see page I-10).

> … a cockatrice' dead-killing eye

When night comes, Prince Tarquin invades Lucrece's bedroom and tells her that if she will not yield, he will take her anyway and kill a slave, whom he will accuse as her lover. The situation paralyzes Lucrece with horror, which the poem indicates by stating:

> Here with a cockatrice' dead-killing eye
> He rouseth up himself and makes a pause;

—lines 540-41

Tarquin's words have the effect on her that a cockatrice's eye would have. The legendary cockatrice, the infinitely poisonous snake, kills with a mere glance (see page I-150).

A similar metaphor from the other direction is then used:

> So his unhallowed haste her words delays,
> And moody Pluto winks while Orpheus plays.

—lines 552-53

The reference is to Orpheus' descent into the underworld to win back his wife Eurydice (see page I-47). His music charmed even Pluto,

and as the harsh king of the underworld was made captive by beauty, so chaste Lucrece was paralyzed by evil.

… still-pining Tantalus. ..

Tarquin rapes Lucrece, then hastens away, miserable and guilty, leaving her behind, miserable and innocent.

To Lucrece, all the world is now fit only for cursing. There is no comfort anywhere or in anything. What good is wealth, for instance? The aged miser, having accumulated his hoard, finds his health gone, and cannot buy youth back with his gold:

> But like still-pining Tantalus he sits
> And useless barns the harvest of his wits,

—lines 858-59

Tantalus is always the very personification of punishment through frustration (see page I-13).

… Fortune's wheel

Nor does time heal matters in her now utterly pessimistic view. It but makes matters worse; merely serving to

… turn the giddy round of Fortune's wheel.

—line 952

Fortune (Tyche), an important goddess to the later Greeks (see page I-135), was often pictured with a turning wheel. That represented the manner in which men's fortunes rose and fell in indifferent alternation.

… lamenting Philomele. ..

One thing she determines. She will tell her husband the truth, so that he might not imagine his desecrated wife to be whole, and so that Tarquin might not be able to smile secretly at Collatine's ignorance.

This conclusion brings her solace and she ends her wailing for a while:

> By this, lamenting Philomele had ended
> This well-tun'd warble of her nightly sorrow,

—lines 1079-80

Philomela was a young woman in the Greek myths who (in Ovid's version of the tale) had undergone an even crueler rape than that of Lucrece, and who was eventually turned into a nightingale which nightly sang the sad song of her misery. Philomela is therefore a poetic synonym for "nightingale" and is frequently used in this way by Shakespeare.

Indeed, Shakespeare used this particular myth in detail in *Titus Andronicus* (see page I-405), which was written shortly before *The Rape of Lucrece.*

The rapist in Philomela's case was a Thracian king named Tereus, and Lucrece sees the comparison, for she says to the nightingale she imagines before her:

> For burthen-wise I'll hum on Tarquin still,
> While thou on Tereus descants better skill;

—lines 1133-34

She then makes use of the legend of the nightingale leaning against a thorn to keep awake all night (see page I-64) to hint at suicide:

> … wretched I

> To imitate thee well, against my heart
> Will fix a sharp knife…

—lines 1136-38

> … Pyrrhus' proud foot…

She will not kill herself, however, until Collatine finds out the truth, and she writes a letter, begging him to hasten home. While she waits she has a chance to study and comment on an elaborate painting of the Greek siege of Troy, which had taken place seven centuries before her time.

(Actually in 509 b.c. Rome was completely under Etruscan cultural influence and was far removed from the world of Greek art and literature. It is extremely unlikely that the real Lucrece would be so knowledgeable of Greek mythology or have an opportunity to study paintings of the Trojan War. However, Shakespeare's high-flown style in this poem made such abundant classical allusion necessary.)

The painting is described. It is

> … made for Priam's Troy
> Before the which is drawn the power of Greece,
> For Helen's rape the city to destroy,

—lines 1367-69

The Trojan War had had its cause, according to legend, in the rape (i.e., abduction) of Helen by Paris (see page I-76), and there is, therefore, an analogy to Lucrece's situation.

The individual Greek heroes are mentioned:

> In Ajax' eyes blunt rage and rigour roll'd;
> But the mild glance that sly Ulysses lent
> Show'd deep regard and smiling government.
> There pleading might you see grave
> Nestor stand, As 'twere encouraging the
> Greeks to fight,

—lines 1398-1402

Ajax was, next to Achilles, the strongest of the Greeks; Ulysses (Odysseus) the craftiest; Nestor the wisest. All play important parts in *Troilus and Cressida* (see pages I-86, I-91, and I-92) and their listing here symbolizes Troy being assailed by strength, cunning, and wisdom.

Beyond that, Troy is confronted also by irresistible fate, as epitomized by the transcendent hero Achilles:

… for Achilles' image stood his spear,
Grip'd in an armed hand; himself behind
Was left unseen. ..

—lines 1424-26

The spear was symbol enough; the obscured hero was more an impersonal and relentless force than a man. He too plays his part, in an all-too-human fashion, in *Troilus and Cressida* (see page I-114).

What's more, the picture shows the Trojan War in its various stages. At another place, Lucrece sees Troy fallen and finds in it a face with sorrows to match her own:

… she despairing Hecuba beheld,
Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,
Which bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot lies.

—lines 1447-49

This incident is past the ending of Homer's *Iliad* and of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida.* It represents the tendencies of the later mythmakers to pile horror on horror and to multiply the tragedy of Troy's final destruction.

The Trojan King, Priam (see page I-79), had witnessed his city besieged for ten years and, one by one, nearly every one of his fifty sons killed. Now at last the Greeks were gone, but they had left behind a large wooden horse (see page I-188). Priam and the Trojans are persuaded to drag the horse into the city and the Greek warriors hidden within emerge at night, open the gates for the remainder of the army, and begin their slaughter.

Priam and his aged wife, Hecuba (see page I-85), flee to an altar of Zeus where they might be safe. Polites, one of Priam's very few surviving sons, comes running madly toward the altar too. Behind him is Pyrrhus (or Neoptolemus) (see page I-115), the son of Achilles.

Pyrrhus has been brought to the field of Troy after his father has been killed by an arrow in the heel from the bow of Paris. He quickly proves himself as brave and as cruel as his father.

Now it is his cruelty that is predominant. He kills Polites even at the altar and in the presence of his parents. Priam, driven mad at the sight, feebly casts a spear at Pyrrhus, who promptly kills him as well.

… perjur'd Sinon...

Lucrece sadly views the depicted miseries of falling Troy:

> Lo, here weeps Hecuba, here Priam dies,
> Here manly Hector faints, here Troilus sounds [swoons]

—lines 1485-86

Hector was the greatest of the Trojan warriors (see page I-188), but in the medieval versions of the story of Troy, it is his younger brother, Troilus, who rises to prominence, and it is Troilus who is the titular hero of *Troilus and Cressida*.

Lucrece finally concentrates, however, on a Greek captive, taken by the Trojans after the Greeks had built their wooden horse. This captive, Sinon, who pretended to be a refugee from the Greeks, told a false story that the wooden horse was an offering to Athena and would forever protect Troy from conquest if brought within the city. He is therefore described as:

> … perjur'd Sinon, whose enchanting story
> The credulous old Priam after slew;

—lines 1521-22

The story which Priam believed brought about the death of the old king. It is to Sinon, the very symbol of treachery in aftertime, that Lucrece compares Tarquin.

> … Brutus drew

Finally Collatine arrives home from the siege, anxious to know what emergency had caused his wife to write. With him are other men of senatorial rank. To them all, Lucrece tells the story, and while they stand there horrified, she draws her knife and kills herself.

For a moment, all stand transfixed. Lucretius, her father, throws himself in sorrow on her body:

> And from the purple fountain Brutus drew
> The murd'rous knife...

—lines 1734-35

This is the first mention of Lucius Junius Brutus, an aristocrat who had escaped the deadly attentions of King Tarquin by pretending to be a moron and therefore harmless. ("Brutus" means "stupid," and this name was, supposedly, given to him because of his successful play acting. However, the truth may be the reverse. It may have been known that one of the destroyers of the Tarquinian kingdom was named Brutus and for lack of other hard details after the Gallic sack in 390 b.c., the meaning of the name was allowed to inspire the tale of his pretending to be a moron.)

Brutus had good reason to play it safe in any way he could, for according to the legend, his father and older brother had been among those executed by Tarquin-something which did not cause him to love the king either.

Now, seeing the shock, horror, and hatred sweeping the spectators, Brutus feels that he will be able to head a popular movement against the kingdom. He no longer needs his pretense of stupidity:

> Brutus, who pluck'd the knife from Lucrece' side,
> Seeing such emulation in their woe,
> Began to clothe his wit in state and pride,
> Burying in Lucrece' wound his folly's show.

—lines 1807-10

Brutus rouses the crowd and the poem ends with a final (and 265th) verse:

> They did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence,
> To show her bleeding body thorough Rome,
> And so to publish Tarquin's foul offence;
> Which being done with speedy diligence,
> The Romans plausibly [with applause] did give consent
> To Tarquin's everlasting banishment.

—lines 1850-55

Thus did the Roman kingdom come to an end. In its place was

established the Roman Republic, which five centuries later was to rule all the Mediterranean world.

10. The Tragedy of Coriolanus

Oe of the most popular of the ancient historians was Plutarch, a Greek who was born in Chaeronea, a town about sixty miles northwest of Athens, in a.d. 46. In his time, Greece had long passed the days of its military splendor and was utterly dominated by Rome, then at the very height of its empire.

Anxious to remind the Romans (and Greeks too) of what the Greeks had once been, Plutarch wrote a series of short biographies about a.d. 100 in which he dealt with men in pairs, one Greek and one Roman, the two being compared and contrasted. Thus, Theseus (see page I-18), the legendary unifier of the Attic peninsula under Athens, was paired with Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. For this reason, the book is commonly called *The Parallel Lives.* Plutarch's style is so pleasing that his book, with its gossipy stories about great historical figures, has remained popular ever since.

It was put into English in 1579 (from a French version) by Sir Thomas North, who did it so well that his book turned out to be one of the prose masterpieces of the Elizabethan Age. Shakespeare read it and used it as the basis for three of his plays. He paid the translation the ultimate compliment of scarcely changing its words in some cases. They made almost perfect blank verse as they stood.

Shakespeare wrote *Coriolanus* about 1608 and it was the last of his three Plutarchian plays. Its subject matter was, however, the earliest in time, so I am placing it first.

The action opens in 494 b.c. (according to legend), only fifteen years after the rape of Lucrece, the expulsion of the Tarquins, and the establishment of the Republic by Brutus (see page I-211). The events described in the play are therefore of extremely dubious value historically, for they take place a century before the destruction of the Roman annals by the Gallic invaders (see page I-204).

Nevertheless, with Plutarch's guidance, Shakespeare can draw upon a complete and interesting story, though perhaps one that is too romantic to sound completely true.

… to die than to famish

Coriolanus opens in the streets of Rome, with citizens hurrying onstage in a fever of agitation, carrying weapons. Some crisis is taking place and the men are desperate. Their leader is called "First Citizen" in the play and he calls out to them:

You are all resolved
rather to die than to famish?

—Act I, scene i, lines 4-5

Only fifteen years before, King Tarquin had been driven out of Rome and the institution of the monarchy had been destroyed. The Roman Republic was set up and was to last for five centuries. Control was placed in the hands of the aristocracy (the "patricians"), with numerous checks and balances, to make sure that no one of the aristocrats could gain so much power as to make himself a king and start the round of tyranny and revolt over again.

That did not mean, however, that Rome had become a little corner of heaven. The patricians, now that they had power in their hands, intended to keep it there. They reserved to themselves virtually all the rights, both political and economic, and yielded very little to the common people ("plebeians").

The plebeians in those days were small farmers who were expected to leave their farms and fight the city's battles whenever duty called. In the years after the first founding of the Republic, duty called frequently, for the exiled king tried to regain his position and made use of neighboring tribes as allies. Rome had to fight for its life.

As a result of those wars, though, the plebeian soldier might return from battle to find his farm neglected, or even ravaged, and would be in need of capital to begin again. The city did not consider itself economically responsible for its farmers and the loans a plebeian could get from the patricians were on harsh terms; and if they were not repaid, he and his family could be sold into slavery.

Furthermore, when food was scarce there was nothing to prevent the patricians (who had the capital for it) from buying up the supplies and then reselling it to the plebeians at a profit, thus capitalizing on the general misfortune.

It would be utterly inhuman to expect that the plebeians would sit still for all this. Undoubtedly, their lot had worsened under the Republic and they found it intolerable that they were expected to give their lives for the patricians while getting nothing in return.

The riotous citizens onstage are rebelling plebeians, then, and the First Citizen reminds them whom they are chiefly to blame for their misfortunes. He cries out:

First you know, Caius Marcius
is chief enemy to the people.

—Act I, scene i, lines 7-8

Caius Marcius is the proper name of the hero of the play. He is to gain the surname of Coriolanus under circumstances to be described later.

Caius Marcius came from an old patrician family. According to Plutarch (in a passage Shakespeare quotes later in the play) he was a descendant of Ancus Marcius, the fourth king of Rome. This did not mean that Caius Marcius, as the descendant of a king, was necessarily a royalist.

Rome's seven kings could be divided into two groups, in fact, with Ancus Marcius belonging to the older. When he became king, he established an advisory body consisting of a hundred of the older representatives of the various clans that made up the city's people. This group of older men was the "Senate," so called from the Latin word for "old men." These senators were called "patricians" from the Latin word for "father," because they were, in theory, the fathers of the people. The word was then extended to all the old families from whom senators might be drawn.

According to tradition, Ancus Marcius brought in new colonists from among conquered tribes outside Rome, since the growing city could use the extra hands. These, however, were not granted the political powers of the old Romans. It was their descendants who became plebeians.

Ancus Marcius was not succeeded by his sons, but by a king called Tarquinius Priscus ("Tarquin the Elder"), who was an Etruscan from the north. (The Etruscans to the north of Rome were at that time the dominant people in Italy, and the succession of Tarquinius Priscus may be actually a sign of Etruscan overlordship of Rome-a situation softened in the Roman legends out of Roman pride.)

Under Tarquinius Priscus, Rome prospered materially, but the power of the king increased at the expense of the patricians. He was finally assassinated by those on the side of the old kings, but eventually the son of Tarquinius Priscus gained the throne. This was the Tarquinius Superbus who was expelled from Rome after the events outlined in *The Rape of Lucrece* (see page I-211).

Caius Marcius, by family tradition, then, would be against the Tarquinian notion of monarchy. And he would be strongly pro-patrician and anti-plebeian.

… dog to the commonalty

When the Second Citizen, a less extreme leader of the plebeian

mob, expresses reservations against aiming at Marcius particularly, the First Citizen replies firmly:

> Against him first:
> he's a very dog to the commonalty.

—Act I, scene i, lines 28-29

This is the key to Marcius' character. He is a "dog" to his enemies. He snarls and bites. Plutarch says of him: "he was so choleric and impatient, that he would yield to no living creature, which made him churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man's conversation."

That is his tragedy: the tragedy of his personality. What he might have gained, and ought to have gamed for the better qualities within himself, he threw away by his perpetual anger and willfulness.

It may have been just this which was the challenge that interested Shakespeare and made him decide to write the play. In *Antony and Cleopatra* (see page I-317), which he had written a year or so earlier, Shakespeare shows us a flawed hero, Mark Antony, who sacrificed honor and worldly ambition to love and to sexual passion. In *Coriolanus* he shows us the reverse, a hero who served only military honor and who allowed nothing to stand in his way (with one exception).

Yet although Antony is loaded to the breaking point with weaknesses, while Marcius is stuffed to the bursting point with virtues, we end by loving Antony and feeling a cold dislike for Coriolanus. Surely Shakespeare is far too good a playwright to have done this by accident. Might not *Coriolanus* be viewed as a frigid satire of the military virtues; as an example of Shakespeare's distaste for war, a distaste that shows through even the official idolatry of the English hero-king in *Henry V* (see page II-481)?

> … to please his mother.. .

When the Second Citizen urges in Marcius' defense that he has served his country well, the First Citizen admits that much but insists it was not done for Rome. He says:

> … though soft-conscienced men can be content
> to say it was for his country,
> he did it to please his mother…

—Act I, scene i, lines 37-39

There is Marcius' one weakness. He loves his mother. And even that weakness is, looked at superficially, another piece of nobility. Why should not a man love his mother? Certainly the United States of today, with its Mother's Day and its semiofficial matriolatry, is no society in which to argue that to love one's mother is wrong, or even a weakness.

Yet it is made plain as the play progresses that the love-of-mother in Coriolanus' case is extreme. It is the clearest case of an Oedipal fixation in Shakespeare, far clearer than in the dubious case of Hamlet.

According to the legend, Marcius' father died while he was very young and the boy was then brought up by his mother. The rearing was successful in establishing a close relationship between them. Here are Plutarch's words: "… touching Marcius, the only thing that made him to love honor was the joy he saw his mother did take of him. For he thought nothing made him so happy and honorable, as that his mother might hear everybody praise and commend him, that she might always see him return with a crown upon his head, and that she might still embrace him with tears running down her cheeks for joy."

This sort of thing, we can see, is not calculated to endear him to Rome generally. Those plebeians who got only the rough side of Marcius' tongue and the harsh side of his advice on policy might not feel any necessity to be grateful for something he did only to please his mother. Let his mother reward him, not the people, and this is what the First Citizen seems to be implying.

Furthermore, Marcius' attitude as described by Plutarch and as adopted by Shakespeare is that of a boy, not a man. Marcius is a boy who never grew up, except physically. Emotionally he remains a boy, not only with respect to his mother but with respect to everything else. If we are to understand the play, this point must not be forgotten.

… To th'Capitol

While the citizens talk, there are shouts from offstage which seem to signify the revolt is spreading. The First Citizen cries out impatiently:

Why slay we prating here?
To th'Capitol!

—Act I, scene i, lines 48-49

The city of Rome eventually spread out over seven hills. One of the earliest to be occupied was the Capitoline Hill. This had steep sides in some directions, which made it suitable for defense. A large temple to Jupiter was built upon it which could also serve as a last-ditch fortress.

The name of the hill is from a Latin word meaning "head," and the legend arose that a head or skull was uncovered when the foundations of the temple were being dug. The Senate met in the Capitol fortress and so it was the center of the city's politics; in that sense the hill was the head (or most important part) of the city, and perhaps that is how the name really arose.

Naturally, the plebeians would want to storm the Capitol and seize control of it.

> Worthy Menenius Agrippa.. .

But now a patrician steps on the scene who is not assaulted. He is a very unusual patrician; one who can speak to the people bluffly and pleasantly and make himself liked by them-the antithesis of Marcius. The newcomer is Menenius Agrippa, and the Second Citizen identifies him at once as:

> Worthy Menenius Agrippa,
> one that hath always loved the people.

—Act I, scene i, lines 52-53

Even the extremist First Citizen says, rather churlishly:

> He's one honest enough;
> would all the rest were so!

—Act I, scene i, lines 54-55

Menenius Agrippa's role in history (even the legendary history of the times before 390 b.c., as purveyed by Livy and Plutarch) is confined to the one incident that is about to be related. Nothing else is

known of him either before or after. Everything else about him in this play is Shakespeare's own invention.

In the actual tale told by Livy and Plutarch, the occasion is not a brawl in the street but, in a way, something more serious. The plebeians have decided to secede altogether. If Rome takes all and gives nothing, she is not a true mother and the plebeians will make one for themselves. They withdraw to a neighboring hill and prepare to found a city of their own.

This is a deadly danger for the patricians, for they need plebeian hands on the farms and in the army. What's more, Rome cannot endure the founding of a neighboring city that is bound to become and remain a deadly enemy. The plebeians must be brought back and, for a wonder, the Senate tried persuasion and gentleness. They sent Menenius Agrippa, a patrician with a reputation for good humor and with no record of animosity toward the plebeians.

> A pretty tale…

Menenius urges the citizens to desist, saying the shortage of food is the fault of the gods, not of the patricians. The First Citizen answers bitterly that the patricians have cornered the food market and now grind the faces of the poor for their own profit. We are strongly tempted to believe the First Citizen, for all he speaks in prose where Menenius orates La gentle pentameters, especially since Menenius drops the subject and decides to be more indirect. He says:

> / shall tell you A pretty tale;
> it may be you have heard it;

—Act I, scene i, lines 90-91

The tale he tells is the fable of the organs of the body rebelling against the belly. The organs complain that they do all the work while the belly gets all the food. The belly answers that it is his function to digest the food and send it out to all the body. Without the belly, all the rest of the organs would weaken and die. The Senate and the patricians are then compared to the belly by Menenius. Through their careful management of the commonwealth, the patricians distribute benefits to all.

The fable may sound well, but surely to the plebeians of the time it must have been unconvincing, since it was precisely their complaint that the patricians were *not* distributing benefits to all the

commonwealth but were reserving them for themselves.

Plutarch says of the tale, "These persuasions pacified the people conditionally." Note the word "conditionally." Words alone were not enough. The people demanded a reform of the government and got it.

> … let me use my sword.. .

Before Shakespeare gets to these reforms, however, he wants to bring on Marcius and display him as he is. Marcius comes whirling in, acknowledges Menenius' greetings in the briefest possible way, and grates out harshly to the citizens:

> What's the matter, you dissentious rogues
> That, nibbing the poor itch of your opinion,
> Make yourself scabs?

—Act I, scene i, lines 165-67

Menenius is attended because he speaks gently. Does Marcius think he can get anywhere by scolding? It doesn't matter whether he does or not, for there is no other way he can act, and the First Citizen indicates that by his dryly ironic rejoinder:

> We have ever your good word.

—Act I, scene i, line 167b

Marcius continues to rail, denouncing them as utterly untrustworthy. He says:

> Trust ye?
> With every minute you do change a mind,
> And call him noble that was now your hate,
> Him vile that was your garland.

—Act I, scene i, lines 182-85

This is, of course, a standard complaint against the common people; that they are fickle and unreasoning. This dates back to the

Greek historians, who showed that the Athenian democracy was subject to radical changes in its policies and that Athenian politicians suffered drastic changes in fortune at the hand of the fickle public-in contrast to the steady policies of Sparta, which was certainly no democracy. (And yet who would prefer the death-in-life of Sparta to the brilliance of Athens?)

Roman writers referred to the *mobile vulgus* ("fickle multitude") and about half a century after Shakespeare's death this was abbreviated to "mob," a word now used for any dangerous and disorderly crowd of people. Had Shakespeare had the use of the word it would undoubtedly have appeared somewhere in this speech.

In Elizabethan England, with its strong oligarchy, the view of the public by "gentlemen" was very much like the view of the Roman patricians. Shakespeare himself was born of a prosperous middle-class family and certainly held himself superior to those he considered plebeian. Furthermore, he was patronized by the aristocracy and liked to identify himself with them.

When, therefore, he had occasion to speak of the common people, he was rarely kind or sympathetic. He makes much of their dirtiness, greasi-ness, and bad breath. And he is never quite as unkind to them as in this play. This is one reason why *Coriolanus* is not one of Shakespeare's more popular plays in modern times. His social views embarrass mid-twentieth-century America.

It may be that Shakespeare is antiplebeian in this play partly because of the conditions in England at the time the play was written. The unpopular Scottish king, James VI, was on the English throne now as James I and there was a rising clamor against him. Voices from below were beginning to be heard against James's theory of absolute monarchy and against his contention that decisions in religion were entirely in the hand of the King. Those voices were to grow louder until (a generation after Shakespeare's death) they led England into revolution and James's son to the headsman's ax.

If Shakespeare was writing with at least part of his attention fixed on securing the approval of the aristocratic portion of his audience, on whose approval so much depended from an economic standpoint, this was the time for harsh words against the commons. The application would be seen.

The amazing thing, though, is that with all the animus against the commons which Shakespeare possesses, for both personal and economic reasons, he does not therefore make Marcius sympathetic. His integrity as a writer and his hatred of war forces Shakespeare to display Marcius' reaction to the commons as an overreaction, and the patrician champion loses us at the very start.

His response to the cry of the people for food, to their protest that

they are starving, is:

> Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
> And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
> With thousands of these quartered slaves, as high
> As I could pick my lance.

—Act I, scene i, lines 198-201

We are acquainted, of course, with people who think the proper answer to the protesting poor is the policeman's club, the cattle prod, and the gun. Such people are difficult to like, and Marcius is one of them.

> Five tribunes. ..

But then Marcius must grumble forth the news that the patricians have not done as he would have liked them to do. They have compromised instead and granted the plebeians a new kind of officer. Marcius describes them as:

> Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms,
> Of their own choice. One's Junius Brutus-
> Sicinius Velutus, and-I know not.
> 'Sdeath! The rabble should have first unroofed the city,
> Ere so prevailed with me…

—Act I, scene i, lines 216-20

It was the grant of the tribunes, rather than Menenius' fable, that brought the plebeians back to Rome. The tribunes were officials drawn from the plebeian ranks and elected by the plebeians only. Their purpose was to safeguard the interests of the plebeians and to keep the patricians from passing laws they felt would be unfair to the common people. Eventually, indeed, the tribunes gained the power of stopping laws they disapproved of by merely crying out "Veto!" ("I forbid!"). Not all the power of the government could pass a law against a tribune's veto.

Actually, the institutions of the Republic developed only gradually and received their familiar form only by 367 b.c. However,

later Roman historians tended to push back several of the features into the undocumented period before 390 b.c. to give them the added sanctity of extra ancient-ness. The history of the tribunate during the fifth century b.c. is quite obscure and the supposed first tribunes listed by Plutarch (he names only two out of the five and Shakespeare follows him in this) make no mark in actual history.

Is Junius Brutus a descendant or relative of the Lucius Junius Brutus who helped found the Republic (see page I-210)? From the name one would suppose so, yet if he were, he would be a patrician and it is of the essence that the tribunes are plebeians. Or was there some dim feeling on the part of the legendmakers that since a Junius Brutus was one of the first two consuls of the Republic, a Junius Brutus ought also to be one of the first two tribunes?

From the standpoint of the play, of course, it doesn't matter.

… the Volsces ."..

In any case, civil broils must now be buried in the face of a foreign menace. A messenger hurries on the scene asking for Marcius. He says:

The news is, sir, the Volsces are in arms.

—Act I, scene i, line 225

At this early stage in their history, the Romans were still fighting for the control of Latium, that section of west-central Italy that occupies a hundred miles of the coast southeast of Rome. It is the home of the Latin language.

The Volscians were the tribes occupying the southeastern half of Latium. Under the last kings of Rome, they along with the other Latin tribes had been part of a loose confederacy headed by Rome, and it may be that all were more or less under Etruscan control. With the expulsion of the Roman kings and the weakening of the Etruscan hold, the Latin tribes squabbled among themselves. The Volscians fought with the Romans throughout the fifth century b.c. and were in the end defeated. In Marcius' time, however, the long duel was only beginning,

A deputation of senators comes to see Marcius now. He is their best warrior and they need his help. Marcius has no illusions that the fight will be an easy one, for the Volscians have a gallant leader, Tullus Aufidius. A senator says:

Then, worthy Marcius,
Attend upon Cominius to these wars.

—Act I, scene i, lines 238-39

Cominius is one of the two consuls of Rome at this time. They were the chief executives of the city, having replaced the office of the ousted king. The consuls were elected for a one-year term, since the Romans felt that one year was insufficient for any consul to build up a large enough personal following to serve in making himself a king.

Two consuls were chosen, rather than one, since the rule was that no action could be taken without agreement between them. It seemed reasonable to suppose that neither consul could take any real steps toward tyranny without the other jealously stepping in to stop him.

The chief duties of the consuls were to be in charge of the armed forces of Rome and to lead the Roman armies in warfare. Cominius, as consul, was to be the army leader, and Marcius, who was not a consul, would have to be a subordinate officer.

The senators are clearly not at all certain that Marcius will agree to this; a commentary on his sullen spirit of self-absorption. Cominius says hastily:

It is your former promise.

—Act I, scene i, line 239

This time, at least, Marcius gives in at once and all sweep off the stage, leaving behind only the two newly appointed tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus. They had come in with the senators but had remained silent. Left alone, they make it clear that they resent Marcius' pride and his harsh taunts.

Sicinius wonders that Marcius can bear to serve as an underling with Cominius commanding, and Brutus suggests a cynical interpretation, saying that Marcius shrewdly schemes to avoid responsibility in case of disaster:

For what miscarries
Shall be the general's fault, though he perform
To th'utmost of a man; and giddy censure
Will then cry out of Marcius "O, if he
Had borne the business!"

—Act I, scene i, lines 267-71

Nowhere in the play, however, is Marcius given credit for so devious a nature. Brutus is simply putting his own style of shrewdness into Marcius' mind. What is much more likely is that Marcius doesn't care who commands and who does not, whom Rome praises and whom she does not. All he wants is a chance to fight so that, in any office, he can win his mother's praise.

… to guard Corioles

The fast Roman response to the Volscian threat forces the Volscians to hasten their own plans. Tullus Aufidius is consulting with the Volscian council and one of the Volscian senators says:

Noble Aufidius,
Take your commission; hie you to your bands:
Let us alone to guard Corioles.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 25-27

This council of war is taking place in Corioli (or Corioles), a town whose location is now uncertain, and this, in itself, is one of the signs that the story of Coriolanus is legendary. At the time of the traditional date of this war, 493 b.c. (a year after the plebeian uprising, although Shakespeare, in the interest of speeding the action, makes it take place immediately afterward), what records we have indicate that Corioli was not a Volscian city but was in alliance with that portion of Latium which was under Roman leadership.

It is very likely that the tales of Coriolanus that were dimly remembered had to be adjusted to account for the name. Why should Marcius be remembered as Coriolanus unless he had played a key role in the conquest of that city? So the conquest was assumed.

And why was Marcius eventually given the name of Coriolanus if it was *not* because of the conquest of the city? No one will ever know. For that matter, can we be certain that such a man as Coriolanus ever existed at all?

… Hector's forehead…

Now, at last, Marcius' mother, Volumnia, is introduced. So is his wife, Virgilia. Virgilia is, however, a shrinking girl, much dominated by her mother-in-law, who is pictured as the ideal Roman matron. She is a most formidable creature and we cannot help but wonder if Marcius' little-boy love for her is not intermingled with more than some little-boy fear.

Shakespeare makes it plain that Marcius has become something that is his mother's deliberate creation. Even when he was young, she tells her daughter-in-law proudly, all she could think of was how honor (that is, military glory) would become him. She says:

> To a cruel war I sent him,
> from whence he returned,
> his brows bound with oak

—Act I, scene iii, lines 14-16

(An oak wreath was the reward granted a soldier who had saved the life of a fellow soldier.)

Virgilia timidly points out that Marcius might have been killed, but Volumnia says, grimly:

> I had rather had eleven die nobly
> for their country than one voluptuously
> surfeit out of action.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 25-27

And when Virgilia gets a little queasy over Volumnia's later reference to possible blood on Marcius' brow, Volumnia then says, in scorn at the other's weakness:

> Away, you fool! It [blood] more becomes a man
> Than gilt his trophy. The breasts of Hecuba,
> When she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier
> Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood

—Act I, scene iii, lines 42-46

In later centuries the Romans invented a legend to the effect that they were descended from the Trojan hero Aeneas (see page I-20), and it is natural to read this back into early Roman history and to imagine that the early Romans identified strongly with the Trojans. Hector (page I-81) was Troy's greatest fighter.

… a gilded butterfly.. .

Volumnia's bloodthirsty and single-minded approach to the notion of military honor makes it plain why Marcius, trained by her, is what he is. But can it be that Shakespeare approves of this sort of mother and finds the product of her training to be admirable? Let's see what follows immediately!

Valeria, a friend of the family, comes to visit, and describes something she has observed that involves Marcius' young son. She says:

1 saw him run after a gilded butterfly;
and when he caught it, he let it go again;
and after it again; and over and over he comes,
and up again; catched it again;
or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas,
he did so set his teeth, and tear it.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 63-68

The promising child, in other words, plays cat-and-mouse with a butterfly and ends by killing it in a rage. But why a butterfly? Surely nothing can be as pretty, harmless, and helpless as a butterfly. It isn't possible that we can feel sympathetic for a child that would deliberately and sadistically kill one. And this is clearly the product of Volumnia's bringing up.

But can we really apply the unreasoning action of a young child to the behavior of the adult Marcius? Surely we can, for Shakespeare makes certain that we do. What does he have Volumnia say to Valeria's tale? She says, calmly:

One on's father's moods.

—Act I, scene iii, line 70

It seems reasonable to suppose that Shakespeare admires neither Volumnia's philosophy nor the individuals it produces.

… another Penelope…

Valeria wants Virgilia to come out on the town with her but Virgilia will not. Like a loyal wife, she will stay at home till her husband is back from the wars. Valeria says, cynically:

> You would be another Penelope;
> yet, they say, all the yarn she spun in
> Ulysses' absence did but fill Ithaca full of moths.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 86-88

Penelope is the very byword of the faithful wife. Married to Ulysses (see page I-90) but a couple of years when he went forth to Troy, she remained faithful for twenty years in his home island of Ithaca, till he returned. In the last several years, he was rumored dead and many suitors clamored for her hand. She put them off with one ruse or another, the most famous being that she wanted first to finish a shroud she was weaving for Ulysses' aged father, Laertes. Every day she wove and every night she ripped out what she had woven, keeping it up a long time before she was caught. The story of Penelope and the suitors makes up a major portion of Homer's *Odyssey*.

… to Cato's wish …

The Roman forces under Marcius and Titus Lartius (another valiant Roman) are meanwhile laying siege to Corioli. They are met with Volscian resolution and are beaten back at the first assault. Marcius, yelling curses at his soldiers in his usual manner, rushes forward and manages to get inside the city gates, which close behind him. He is alone in an enemy city.

Titus Lartius, coming up now, hears the news, and speaks of him as already dead. He says, apostrophizing the as-good-as-dead Marcius:

> Thou wast a soldier
> Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
> Only in strokes; but with thy grim looks and
> The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds
> Thou mad'st thine enemies shake …

—Act I, scene iv, lines 57-61

This is taken almost verbatim from Plutarch, where that biographer describes Marcius as a soldier after Cato's heart. The Cato referred to is Marcus Porcius Cato, often called Cato the Censor (an office which he held with vigor), for he was a model of old-fashioned Roman virtue. He was completely honest and completely bound to duty, but he was cold, cruel, sour, miserly, and narrow-minded. He was heartless to his slaves and lacked any tender feelings for his wife and children. As censor, he was perfectly capable of fining a Roman patrician for kissing his own wife in the presence of their children.

It was perfectly proper for Plutarch to quote Cato in this connection, for he lived over three centuries after Cato. Shakespeare, however, is guilty of negligence in placing the remark in Lartius' mouth without making the necessary modification, for it now becomes an amusing anachronism. The siege of Corioli took place, according to legend, in 493 b.c., and Cato wasn't born till 243 b.c., two and a half centuries later (and didn't become censor till 184 b.c.).

Caius Marcius Coriolanus

But Marcius is not dead. If the tale were not a legend, magnified in the telling, even if we allow a kernel of truth, he would undoubtedly be dead. Perhaps this part of the tale of Marcius was inspired by a similar incident in the life of Alexander the Great.

In 326 b.c. Alexander was conducting his last major campaign in what was then called India, but in a region which is now part of Pakistan. They laid siege to a town called Multan, which is located about 175 miles southwest of Lahore, on one of the chief tributaries of the Indus. In a fever of excitement, Alexander pressed forward to the walls and managed to climb them and leap into the city without looking to see whether the army was following or not.

For a while, he was alone in the midst of enemies. One or two men managed to join him and when Alexander was struck down and seriously wounded they protected him until the army made its way into the city. Alexander survived, but it was a very near thing.

Marcius does better than that, however. No one joins him and he appears on the battlements, bleeding, but not seriously wounded. Only now does the rest of the army, in a fever of enthusiasm, storm the city and take it.

Marcius then leads part of the army to join Cominius and together they defeat the Volscians under Tullus Aufidius.

Now the army rings with praises for Marcius, but when Titus Lartius tries to put those praises into words, Marcius says, gruffly:

> Pray now, no more. My mother,
> Who has a charter to extol her blood,
> When she does praise me grieves me.

—Act I, scene ix, lines 13-15

This sounds like modesty, like superhuman modesty, but is it? Marcius is a loner. His universe consists of himself alone, plus his mother. He is willing to enter Corioli alone, to fight alone against an army; the soldiers under his command are but a source of annoyance to him.

Why, then, should he want their praise? Who are they to praise him? Far from this being a true mark of modesty, it might rather be interpreted as the sign of a most confounded arrogance. Only his mother has a right to praise him and even that is not entirely acceptable to him. In the remark, further, he naively reveals the fact that he places his mother (as far as the right of praise is concerned) above Rome.

Nevertheless, he is not to get away without some mark of favor. Cominius, the consul, gives him an added name, saying:

> … from this time,
> For what he did before Corioles, call him,
> With all th'applause and clamor of the host,
> Caius Marcius Coriolanus.

—Act I, scene ix, lines 62-65

It was a Roman custom, when one of their generals won a signal victory over some particular foreign enemy, to give him an additional name taken from the conquered place or people. Sometimes the individual was thereafter known by his new title almost exclusively.

The most renowned case of this in Roman history is that of Publius Cornelius Scipio. Scipio was the final conqueror of Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, the greatest and most feared enemy Rome ever had in the days of its greatness, and certainly one of the most remarkable captains in the lamentable history of warfare. The battle in which Scipio finally overcame Hannibal was fought at Zama in 202 b.c., a city in northern Africa. As a consequence, the title "Africanus" was added to Scipio's name.

"Coriolanus" is formed in the same fashion. From this point on in the play, his speeches are marked "Coriolanus" rather than "Marcius" and it is the former name that is given to the tragedy itself.

> … Lycurguses. ..

Back at Rome, the citizens are still waiting for news from the army. The two tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, cannot help but hope for a little bad news, since that would weaken the position of Marcius (they don't yet know his new title).

Menenius, the friend of Marcius and one who, because of his age, considers himself practically a foster father of the younger man, is also onstage and rails wittily at the uncomfortable tribunes, who lack the verbal agility to stand up to him. Menenius is particularly annoyed because the tribunes call Marcius proud, and at one point he says to them:

> Meeting such wealsmen as you are-
> I cannot call you Lycurguses.. .

—Act II, scene i, lines 54-56

"Wealsmen" are statesmen, a term Menenius uses ironically, since he considers them anything but that. And lest their denseness allow them to mistake his remark for a compliment, he specifically denies that they can be compared to Lycurgus.

Lycurgus, according to tradition, was a Spartan leader of the ninth century b.c. who devised the social, economic, and political system under which the Spartans lived in ancient times. The Spartan aristocracy devoted themselves to a military regime that made even the Roman system look pallid. (Actually it was developed in the seventh century b.c. and may have been attributed to the legendary Lycurgus to give it greater authority.)

It was a narrow, constricted, miserable way of life that won the Spartans many victories and therefore gained them much praise by those who valued victories for themselves and who did not have to live in Sparta at the time. It cost Sparta everything else but military victory, and in the end the narrow and inflexible outlook it gave them cost them victory as well.

Nevertheless, Lycurgus remained as the byword for the statesman and lawgiver.

Menenius grows wordier and more articulate with each speech as the tribunes become more and more beaten down. Finally, he makes

the direct comparison:

> Yet you must be saying Marcius is proud;
> who, in a cheap estimation,
> is worth all your predecessors since Deucalion.

—Act II, scene i, lines 92-94

Deucalion was the sole male survivor of a great flood in the Greek legends (see page I-164) and from him all later men were considered to be descended.

… in Galen. ..

But now the three women enter-Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria-with news that Marcius is returning in victory. They have letters and there is one for Menenius.

The voluble old man is so elated at the news, and especially at the grand tale that there is a letter for him, that he throws his cap in the air and declares it is the best medicine he could have. He says:

> The most sovereign prescription
> in Galen is but empiricutic [quackish],
> and, to this preservative,
> of no better report than a horse-drench.

—Act II, scene i, lines 119-21

This is an even more amusing anachronism than the reference to Cato. Galen was a Greek physician who practiced in Rome and whose books, throughout the Middle Ages and into early modern times, were considered the last word in medical theory and practice. The only trouble is that he was at the height of his career about a.d. 180, nearly seven centuries *after* the time of Menenius.

… the repulse of Tarquin.. .

Menenius and Volumnia now engage in a grisly counting of wounds and scars on Marcius' body. Volumnia says:

> He received in the repulse
> of Tarquin seven hurts i'th'body.

—Act II, scene i, lines 154-55

After the eviction of Tarquin (see page I-211), the ex-King made several attempts to regain power, first with the aid of the Etruscans and then with the aid of other Latin cities. He was defeated at each attempt, the final battle coming at Lake Regillus in 496 b.c., only two years before the date of the opening scene of *Coriolanus.*

I warrant him consul

Coriolanus himself comes now, and his new title is announced to the entire city. He kneels first of all to his mother, and only after her reminder does he address his wife. The city is wild over him and it is clear he can receive whatever honor or office it can bestow on him. Volumnia states, with satisfaction, what is in many minds:

Only
There's one thing wanting, which I doubt not but
Our Rome will cast upon thee.

—Act II, scene i, lines 206-8

It is the consulship itself obviously, and Volumnia, as usual, continues to guide her son toward the heights.

The two tribunes are also aware of the waiting consulship, and they are worried. Sicinius says:

On the sudden,
I warrant him consul.

—Act II, scene i, lines 227-28

From their standpoint, nothing could be worse. Coriolanus' reactionary beliefs are well known. He would have killed the plebeians rather than compromise with them in the matter of tribunes. As a willful and determined consul, he might cancel that compromise. As Brutus says:

Then our office may,
During his power, go sleep.

—Act II, scene i, lines 228-29

Their only hope is that Coriolanus, through his own pride, will ruin his own chances.

At sixteen years

We move swiftly to the Capitol, the seat of the government, where the people are gathered to elect the new consuls, of whom Coriolanus is odds-on favorite to be one.

However, to achieve the goal, Coriolanus must get the vote of the people, and the way in which this was done was to flatter and cajole them, very much as in our own time. In early Roman times, it was customary for a candidate for the consulate to dress humbly, speak softly, and show the scars won in battle. He did so in an unadorned white toga (hence our word "candidate," from the Latin word for "dressed in white").

The routine begins with the equivalent of a nominating speech from Cominius, the then-consul, and it sounds very much (allowing for changes in times and manners) like a nominating speech one might make today. Cominius begins:

At sixteen years,
When Tarquin made a head for Rome,
he fought Beyond the mark of others.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 88-90

If we allow Tarquin's earliest battle to regain Rome to have been in 509 b.c. and if Coriolanus was sixteen then, we can say he was born in 525 b.c. and was thirty-two years old at the taking of Corioli. If the reference is to one of Tarquin's later attempts, then Coriolanus was younger than thirty-two.

Be taken from the people

The eloquent summary by Cominius of a career of heroic battling wins over the patricians and Menenius says it remains only to speak to the people. Coriolanus demurs rather churlishly, and the tribunes, seeing their chance, at once demand that the candidate live up to the letter of the custom.

Coriolanus has this to say of the custom:

> It is a part
> That 1 shall blush in acting, and might well
> Be taken from the people.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 145-47

The tribunes could ask no better attitude than that. To say baldly that he wishes to take privileges from the people is absolutely no way to get their vote, and the tribunes rush away to see to it that the plebeians are made aware of Coriolanus' attitude.

> … ask it kindly

Coriolanus does put on the uniform of humility, grumbling fiercely at every stage of the game and keeping poor Menenius in a sweat, for the old man is working overtime to keep him quiet and respectful just long enough.

Coriolanus cannot be so. Try as he might, he ends by being contemptuous as the voting citizens approach. He asks one of them:

> Well then, I pray,
> your price o'th'consulship?

—Act II, scene iii, lines 77-78

To which the citizen makes a most reasonable reply, giving the price of anything requested, however deserving it may be:

> The price is, to ask it kindly.

—Act II, scene iii, line 79

And that is precisely what Coriolanus, thanks to his mother's teachings, cannot do.

> … in free contempt

Almost creaking in the attempt, Coriolanus manages to bend an absolute minimum so that he might make it seem, to inquiring citizens, that he does indeed "ask it kindly." That, combined with his great reputation of the moment, lures the people into promising to vote for him.

It is only afterward, by comparing notes, that they realize his bending was more seeming than actual and that he did not, for instance, actually show his scars to anyone. (This too sounds like modesty, but it can be interpreted as the result of arrogance. He will not stoop to win the approval of anyone. He wants it as his right and without question.)

The tribunes are disgusted that the plebeians have been so easily fooled, and Brutus demands impatiently:

> Did you perceive
> He did solicit you in free contempt
> When he did need your loves; and do you think
> That his contempt shall not be bruising to you
> When he hath power to crush?

—Act II, scene iii, lines 205-9

The plebeians, seeing the good sense in this, veer about and decide to withdraw their approval while there is still time and the official vote has not yet been taken.

(Plutarch says that Coriolanus actually showed his scars and won their favor more fairly. It was only when, on the actual voting day, he showed up with an escort of patricians, in all his pomp and pride, that the plebeians turned from him. Shakespeare's modification fits better the personality the dramatist has decided to portray.)

> … Numa's daughter's son

The plebeians are rather embarrassed at having to reverse their votes and the tribunes offer to take the blame. They say the plebeians might claim to have been against Coriolanus all along but that the

tribunes had talked them into favoring him. Now, in turning against him, they had merely shaken off the tribunes' propaganda.

This seems awfully poor. The tribunes were the very spearhead of the antipaitrician and, in particular, anti-Coriolanus, movement. Could the patricians for a moment believe that they had spoken in favor of Coriolanus? Or was Shakespeare merely seizing the opportunity to insert a passage from Plutarch that would lend another bit of historical authenticity to the play?

He has Brutus tell them all the wonderful things the tribunes would have said about Coriolanus in persuading the plebeians to vote for him:

> The noble house o'th'Marcians, from whence came
> That Ancus Marcius, Numa's daughter's son,
> Who after great Hostilius here was king;
> Of the same house Publius and Quintus were
> That our best water brought by conduits hither;
>
> —Act II, scene iii, lines 244-48

This is straight out of North's translation of Plutarch, almost word for word.

The Numa referred to is Numa Pompilius, who reigned as second king of Rome, coming to the throne, according to legend, in 716 b.c., after the death of Romulus, Rome's founder. He was a mild and exemplary king, upon whom Roman legend fixed the founding of Roman religion. There was peace in his reign and he was always looked back to as an ideal ruler.

He reigned till 673 b.c. and was followed by Tullus Hostilius, who ruled till 641 b.c. and who is also mentioned in this passage.

Following Hostilius, the throne was voted to Ancus Marcius, who, as the passage states, was a grandson of Numa on his mother's side. Thus, Coriolanus was descended from two of Rome's seven kings.

So much is legendary. The next is probably anachronistic. The city of Rome, in its great days, had its water supplied through aqueducts. No other city of ancient or medieval times had such an elaborate water system. In fact, Rome had a better water system than Shakespeare's London did. Naturally, writers of both ancient and later times tended to be awed by Rome's aqueducts and, if anything, to overemphasize them.

The Rome of Coriolanus' day was still a small town, quite rude and uncivilized. It certainly had no elaborate aqueducts, but relied on wells and on the Tiber River. The first important aqueducts to be built

were constructed in 312 b.c., nearly two centuries after Coriolanus' time.

And Censorinus…

Brutus continues listing Coriolanus' ancestors:

> And Censorinus that was so surnamed
> And nobly named so, twice being censor,
> Was his great ancestor.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 244-51

It is very unlikely that Censorinus could have existed. He too must be an anachronism born of the deliberate putting back of Roman customs into the legendary days before the Gallic sack. In Coriolanus' time, there had scarcely been time for one man to serve as censor twice, especially since the office was not founded till 443 b.c., half a century after the events in this play.

… to Antium

While waiting for the vote, Coriolanus discusses foreign affairs with the other soldiers, Cominius and Titus Lartius. The Volscians, while defeated, have not been crushed, and Tullus Aufidius, their great champion, still lives. Titus Lartius had seen him under a safe-conduct and says:

> On safeguard he came to me; and did curse
> Against the Volsces, for they had so vilely
> Yielded the town. He is retired to Antium.

—Act III, scene i, lines 9-11

Antium is a coastal Latin town, thirty-three miles south of Rome. (That is the measure of Rome's as yet infant state, that its chief enemies, even after a retreat, were yet little more than thirty miles away.)

Antium's original fame was as a Volscian stronghold, as it is in this play, and it was not made fully subject to Rome till 341 b.c., a

century and a half after Coriolanus' time. In the days of Rome's greatness, it was a favorite seaside resort of wealthy Romans. The Emperor Nero was born there and built a magnificent villa there.

The modern Italian version of its name is Anzio and under that name it gained a grisly, if fleeting, notoriety during World War II. An Allied amphibious force landed there on January 22, 1944, forming the Anzio bridgehead. It was hoped that this would link up quickly with other forces advancing up the Italian peninsula, but strong German resistance kept the bridgehead bloodily in being for four months, the linkage with the main Allied forces not taking place till May 25.

… this Triton …

As Coriolanus and his friends move on to the Senate, they are stopped by the tribunes and get the astonishing news that Coriolanus, who thought he had clinched the vote, is in disfavor with the plebeians after all and is to be denied the consulship. The tribunes make no effort to soften the blow and present the matter arrogantly in the hope that Coriolanus will burst into a rage and harm his own cause further.

He does. Rather than attempt to placate the tribunes, he plainly states his extreme rightist position concerning the plebeians.

Then, when the tribune Sicinius orders the raging Coriolanus to remain where he is and peremptorily forbids him to advance toward the Capitol, Coriolanus repeats Sicinius' words with the utter scorn of the born patrician for someone he views as a lowborn rascal. He says:

> Shall remain!
> Hear you this Triton of the minnows?
> Mark you His absolute "shall"?

—Act HI, scene i, lines 88-90

Triton was a son of Neptune (Poseidon) in the Greek myths and was pictured as a merman-fish from the waist down. He was usually depicted as blowing a blast on a large sea shell, a blast that might either rouse the winds or calm the sea. In either case, he controlled the waves. Thus, the tribune was being mocked as one who controlled a herd of insignificant rabble and thought he was powerful in consequence. He was a Triton, but of nothing but minnows.

… Hydra here…

Coriolanus turns on the patricians as well, for he maintains that they have given rise to this trouble by foolishly appeasing the plebeians and granting them rights instead of beating them down by force. He says:

You grave but reckless senators, have you thus
Given Hydra here to choose an officer,

—Act III, scene i, lines 92-93

The Hydra was a monster that was killed by Hercules as his second labor (see page I-24). It was pictured as a huge sea creature with a dog-like body and eight or nine heads, one of which was immortal. (The picture may have arisen as an improvement on the eight-tentacled octopus.)

Later mythmakers improved matters by giving the Hydra fifty heads, or one hundred, or even ten thousand. Furthermore, as each head was cut off, two new ones grew into place instantly. Again, the creature was pictured as so poisonous its very odor could kill, and so on.

Hercules managed anyway. Each tune he cut off a head, he had an assistant sear the stump with fire to prevent new growths. The immortal head he buried under a huge rock and thus, finally, the monster was killed.

But this made the Hydra a byword for anything with many heads, or anything which reappeared when dispatched. An intricate social difficulty, which bobs up again after each effort made to cure matters, is "Hydra-headed," and in our own times it would seem that all social problems are of this nature.

Again, the word may well be applied to a mob and it is this metaphor that is being used by Coriolanus. The decision as to the choice of consul has been handed over to the many-headed multitude.

The aediles. ..

Coriolanus continues in this way, in overwhelming rage, despite all attempts by Menenius and other patricians with common sense to stop him.

Finally, he threatens to take away the plebeians' political gains by

force. Now the tribunes have all they want. Not only has Coriolanus lost any possible chance of gaining the plebeian vote; he has committed actual treason by advocating unconstitutional methods of procedure. Brutus cries out:

> The aediles, ho!
> Let him be apprehended.

—Act III, scene i, lines 171-72

The aediles were plebeian officials who had come into existence at the same time the tribunes had. They had a number of responsibilities in their time. They were in charge of the streets, of the distribution of grain, of the public celebrations. Here they appear in their role as protectors of the tribunes; officers empowered to arrest those who threatened the tribunal safety.

> … to th'rock Tarpeian…

Naturally, Coriolanus is not going to submit tamely to arrest; nor, for that matter, are the patricians ready to see him arrested. The aediles can do nothing by themselves, but in a moment the stage swarms with plebeians coming to the aid of their tribunes. A full-fledged riot is in progress, despite everything Menenius can do to try to calm matters.

The tribune Sicinius manages to seize the floor and denounces Coriolanus, demanding not only his arrest, but his instant conviction of treason and his execution.

> Therefore lay hold of him;
> Bear him to th'rock Tarpeian,
> and from thence Into destruction cast him.

—Act III, scene i, lines 211-13

The Tarpeian Rock is a cliff that formed part of the Capitoline Hill (see page I-217). To explain its name a legend arose in later times that went as follows:

In the first decades of Rome's existence, when it was under its founder and first king, Romulus, there was war with the Sabines, a

tribe of the vicinity. The Sabines laid siege to the Capitoline Hill and their chance at victory came through Tarpeia, the daughter of the Roman commander who held sway over the defending forces.

The Sabines managed to persuade Tarpeia to open the gates for them in return for what they wore on their left arms. (Tarpeia set that condition with reference to the gold bracelets they wore there.) That night she secretly opened the gates, and the first few Sabines, as they entered, threw their shields at her, for they wore their shields on their left arms too. The Sabines, who (like most people) were willing to make use of traitors, but didn't like them, in this way kept their bargain.

The first criminal to be executed on the Capitoline Hill gave her name, therefore, to the later place of execution. (The story was undoubtedly made up to account for the name and is very unlikely to have even the slightest foundation in historical fact.)

… his trident

Coriolanus draws his sword. He is certainly not going to be led tamely to execution, and the riot sharpens. When the plebeians are temporarily driven off, Menenius and the other patricians manage, just barely, to persuade Coriolanus to leave. He is forced away for his own safety and because there can be no peacemaking as long as he is there to fire up popular resentment with his own strident tongue.

Menenius says of him when he is gone:

> His nature is too noble for the world:
> He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
> Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth:

—Act III, scene i, lines 254-56

Jupiter (Jove) has the lightning bolt as his chief weapon. Neptune's trident ("three teeth") is the three-pointed spear with which he (like Triton and his shell) calmed the waves or drove them to fury. Both lightning bolt and trident were unique attributes, and if Coriolanus would not stoop to beg for them, how much less would he stoop for a mere consulship.

And yet does Menenius really believe that this is a sign of nobility-or of stupidity? In his very next speech, he bursts out:

What the vengeance!

Could he not speak 'em fair?

—Act III, scene i, lines 261-62

When the plebeians return, Menenius just barely manages to talk them out of their determination for instant execution and gains Coriolanus the chance of a trial.

/ muse my mother

Coriolanus is at home, utterly unrepentant. He feels he has done completely right and would do it again at whatever risk. Only one thing bothers him. His mother, somehow, is not happy. Coriolanus says:

/ muse my mother
Does not approve me further, who was wont
To call them [the plebeians] woolen vassals…

—Act III, scene ii, lines 7-9

And when his mother conies in, he says to her in a child's aggrieved tone:

I talk of you:
Why did you wish me milder?
Would you have me False to my nature?
Rather say I play The man I am.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 13-16

But she *does* wish him milder. It is not because she (or Menenius for that matter) are more liberal than Coriolanus or less likely to use harsh measures. It is a matter of being more politic. First get the consulship, by any means, and then, with power, crush the plebeians. She says:

I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger

To better vantage.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 29-31

Menenius and the rest are urging him now to stand trial voluntarily, to repent his words and, in effect, crawl a little. Coriolanus is horrified at the very thought, but his mother adds her pleas, saying in one phrase exactly what is wrong with him:

You are too absolute;

—Act III, scene ii, line 39

But that, of course, is her own fault, since she taught him to treat the world as though it consisted of nothing but gilded butterflies which he might tear apart at a mindless whim.

She tells him now flatly that he must treat this as a stratagem of war. He would play a part to deceive an enemy in arms and cajole a town to surrender. Let him now play a part to deceive the plebeians. (There is no thought in the mind of Volumnia or the other patricians-or probably in those of Shakespeare's audience-that such a course of action is dishonorable.)

To force Coriolanus to do this, Volumnia does not scruple to pull hard at the Oedipal ties that bind him to her:

/ prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said
My praises made thee first a soldier, so,
To have my praise for this, perform a part
Thou hast not done before.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 107-110

That is it. Coriolanus would not be swayed by thoughts of his own safety, by the city's danger, by his friend's reasoning, but once his mother has pled, he says:

Well, I must do't.

—Act III, scene ii, line 110b

For a moment, though, his resolution wavers even now. He can't go through with it. Thereupon Volumnia throws up her hands and tells him angrily to do as he pleases. At that, Coriolanus promptly gives in, out of the absolute terror of being in the position of disobeying his mother's wishes. He says, in little-boy terms:

> Pray, be content:
> Mother, I am going to the marketplace;
> Chide me no more.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 130-32

And yet, after all that, when he comes to trial, he can no more hold his tongue than he can jump to the moon. It is an easy task for the tribunes to irritate him into madness again. He is convicted of treason and condemned, not to death at the Tarpeian Rock, but to lifelong exile. (This is actually supposed to have taken place in 491 b.c.)

It is a politic commutation of sentence, for the tribunes could now say that Coriolanus had deserved death, but that they had shown mercy out of consideration for his services in war.

> … to pluck from them their tribunes.. .

Coriolanus leaves the city, after showing himself surprisingly cheerful, firm, resolute, and in good heart, cheering up his mother and his friends. (Plutarch describes the leave-taking similarly.)

Shakespeare has him make a significant comment, however. Coriolanus says:

> I shall be loved when I am lacked.

—Act IV, scene i, line 15

This is a strange optimism on his part. He does not show elsewhere in this play any such general confidence in his fellowmen. It almost sounds as though he has something specific in mind; that he

has firm information that his friends intend to take action to bring him back; even unconstitutional action.

That this may be so is strengthened by an odd scene that follows hard thereafter and which seems somewhat irrelevant to the action. A Roman named Nicanor and a Volscian named Adrian meet somewhere between Rome and Antium. Their speeches are ascribed merely to "Roman" and "Volsce." They appear nowhere else in the play and the only purpose of the scene is to highlight gathering treason in Rome on the part of the patricians.

The Roman says:

> … the nobles receive so to heart
> the banishment of that worthy Coriolanus,
> that they are in a ripe aptness to take all power
> from the people and to pluck from them their tribunes forever.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 21-25

To attain this end, it may be that the patricians are even considering allying themselves with the common enemy. The Volscian had said of his own people:

> … they are in a most warlike preparation,
> and hope to come upon them [the Romans]
> in the heat of their division.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 17-19

The Roman's response to this news of the Volscian activity is:

> / am joyful to hear
> of their readiness…

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 48-50

> My birthplace hate I …

Yet the next scene does not follow this up. There is a sudden break. Coriolanus has made his way to Antium. It is his intention to

seek out Tullus Aufidius himself and throw himself upon his mercy. He says:

> My birthplace hate I, and my love's upon
> This enemy town. I'll enter. If he slay me,
> He does fair justice; if he give me way,
> I'll do his country service.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 23-26

What happened? According to the previous scene, it looked as though there were a conspiracy to bring Coriolanus back, even with Volscian help. Nothing further of that is mentioned in the play. Plutarch, to be sure, says that the nobles turned against Coriolanus, but only after the exiled man had joined the Volscians. As for his motive in joining the enemy, Plutarch cites merely rage and desire for revenge.

Yet it almost seems as though Shakespeare had something better in mind…

It often happened in the history of the Greek cities that there were internal disturbances between the social classes and that the leaders of one side or the other would be exiled. In such cases, it was common for the exiles to join a foreign enemy and fight their own city with the aid of their sympathizers within, as was the case of Alcibiades, for instance (see page I-142), some eighty years after the time of Coriolanus. (Indeed, Plutarch gives his biographies of Coriolanus and Alcibiades as a pair, showing himself aware of the similarities in their histories.)

It was this constant civil war and almost constant treason that helped bring down the Greeks and place them at last at the mercy of first the Macedonians and then the Romans.

It never happened in Rome. There were internecine struggles within the city in plenty throughout the history of the Republic, but *never* in the face of an outside enemy. When the foreign armies invaded, all Romans locked arms and this was never so remarkable or admirable as when Hannibal nearly ruined the realm two and a half centuries after the time of Coriolanus. It was this which saved Rome and brought her to world empire at last.

It would almost seem, then, as though there were a missing scene here. Perhaps there should be a scene in Rome after the meeting of the Roman and Volsce, one in which the patricians are meditating treason. The news of the Volscian invasion comes, and after some soul searching, Cominius might rise and insist that the city must come

before class and that even Coriolanus must be sacrificed in the greater need of the defense of Rome. And with that the conspiracy would collapse.

> … our dastard nobles.. .

Coriolanus, hearing of this, is more than disappointed. It is the last straw. *Everyone* has deserted him. Surely it must be this which makes him turn to the Volscians. Plutarch doesn't have it this way, but Plutarch is only repeating a legend and in my opinion he could have worked it out better at this point. Shakespeare seems to have started in this direction and then never wrote or dropped out the crucial scene.

It is only that missing scene that can explain what happens next. Coriolanus makes his way, in disguise, to the house of Tullus Aufidius, who is there presiding over a feast to the Volscian nobles, and reveals himself as a suppliant. He tells Aufidius he has nothing left but his name:

> The cruelty and envy of the people,
> Permitted by our dastard nobles, who
> Have all forsook me, hath devoured the rest.
>
> —Act IV, scene v, lines 78-80

Why "dastard nobles?" How have they "forsook" him? Only that missing scene would make this plain and account for the colossal bitterness of Coriolanus during the remainder of the play, against not only the plebeians, but the entire city.

The Coriolanus legend up to this point, by the way, bears a suspicious resemblance to the tale of Themistocles, a famous Athenian who was actually a contemporary of Coriolanus (except that Themistocles is a historical character and Coriolanus is not).

Themistocles was the moving spirit behind the Athenian-led Greek victory over the Persians in 480 b.c. (thirteen years after the supposed capture of Corioli). After the defeat, however, when Athens was secure, Themistocles' growing pride offended the Athenians. About 472 b.c. he was exiled from the city. In exile, evidence of treason was found against him and he had to make his way to Persia itself as the only place he could be safe.

On his way there he passed through the city of a man who was his personal enemy-Admetus, King of the Molossians. (Molossia was

later known as Epirus and is, in modern times, called Albania.)

Themistocles came to Admetus in disguise and appealed to him as a fugitive, just as Coriolanus appealed to Aufidius.

Here the stories part company, however. Themistocles was accepted by Admetus and finally made his way to Persia, where he lived out the remainder of his life. He never took any actual action against Athens.

Coriolanus did not wish escape. He wished revenge.

> Joined with Aufidius…

Aufidius accepts Coriolanus' help joyfully. In fact, he offers him generalship over half the army, for what may seem to us perfectly valid reasons. It may seem odd to take the chance of turning over half his forces to someone who until recently had been the chief enemy of the Volscians, but by now Aufidius must know Coriolanus' character well. He must know that Coriolanus has in his mind room for nothing but rage. If the rage is now turned against Rome, the breach between man and city will be made permanent. Coriolanus will have to continue aiding the Volscians, placing his fighting ability and his inside knowledge of Rome at Volscian disposal. And then, when Rome is utterly defeated and wiped out, Coriolanus can be taken care of.

Rome, meanwhile, is in a temporary state of utter peace and the tribunes congratulate themselves at having brought things to such a happy conclusion. The bad news comes soon enough, however. A messenger dashes in saying:

> It is spoke freely out of many mouths,
> How probable I do not know, that Marcius,
> Joined with Aufidius, leads a power 'gainst Rome,

—Act IV, scene vi, lines 65-67

Perhaps this is why the missing scene is missing (either taken out or never written). For the missing scene to have worked, there would have had to be news of a Volscian advance, followed by a patrician refusal to abandon the city, so that Coriolanus would have had to join the enemy in a rage. But then he would merely be joining a marching army as a hanger-on.

This way, the Volscians don't move until Coriolanus joins them, and the news arrives that not only is the enemy approaching but the exiled Coriolanus is at their head. So, for the sake of this added drama, the missing scene is removed. It means that the meeting

between the Roman and the Volsce is made irrelevant and Coriolanus' desertion to the Volscians and his anger against the "dastard nobles" left inadequately motivated. In this case, apparently, Shakespeare had his choice of two lines of development and did not manage to make a clear decision.

… cowardly nobles.. .

The failure to make a clear decision between the two courses of development haunts this sixth scene of the fourth act. At first the patricians seem rather exultant about Coriolanus' assault. Cominius says of the Vol-scians:

they follow him
Against us brats with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,

—Act IV, scene vi, lines 93-95

Cominius is actually proud of Coriolanus' ascendancy over the Vol-scians, but note the picture of butterfly killing again. It is as though Shakespeare were reminding us that a child who is brought up as a butterfly killer may end as a city destroyer.

In the absence of the missing scene, it is perhaps here that the patricians ought to overcome their sympathy and admiration for Coriolanus and decide that patriotism takes priority. The necessary speech does not occur (perhaps because it was originally in the lost scene and was not shifted when the scene was lost). That it may have at one time been present might be indicated by a bitter remark of Menenius to the tribunes:

We loved him, but, like beasts
And cowardly nobles, gave way unto your clusters.

—Act IV, scene vi, lines 122-23

Of course, it might refer to the patricians acceding to the sentence of exile.

… more proudlier

Yet all is not well with Coriolanus, either. He is still Coriolanus

and can no more bend to the Volscians, now that he is leading them, than he could ever bend to the Romans. The Volscian officers are uneasy and even Tullus Aufidius is unhappy, saying:

> He bears himself more proudlier,
> Even to my person, than I thought he would
> When first I did embrace him; yet his nature
> In that's no changeling. ..

—Act IV, scene vii, lines 8-11

And yet he must be used, for he is conquering Rome without even having to fight. Aufidius says:

> All places yield to him ere he sits down,
> And the nobility of Rome are his;
> The senators and patricians love him too.

—Act IV, scene vii, lines 28-30

Apparently, even though the patricians of Rome have agreed to resist, there remain some who cling more tightly to party than to country. And even those who are intending to resist can do so with only half a heart.

And yet can the patricians honestly think that the Volscians are willing to serve as nothing more than a bunch of errand boys for them, to help them back to power out of love and kindness? The outside power, brought in to help in an internal fight, stays (all history shows) to help itself at the expense of all. And Aufidius says, at the end of the scene, apostrophizing the absent Coriolanus (to whom he refers by the familiar first name as though the man is someone he can now consider a tool or servant):

> When, Caius, Rome is thine,
> Thou art poor'st of all; then shortly art thou mine

—Act IV, scene vii, lines 56-57

The patricians who decide to resist Coriolanus may be moved by abstract love of country, but they may also be moved by a realization of the danger of accepting foreign help under any circumstances. This is something the Greeks never learned (and few nations since).

… one poor grain or two …

Soon Rome knows the worst. It is Coriolanus' vengeful desire to burn it to the ground. Surrender will not satisfy him; only destruction will. (This is purely psychotic unless the patricians had specifically deserted Coriolanus in the scene I postulate to be missing.)

Cominius, the ex-consul, and Coriolanus' old general, had gone to plead and had been met coldly. Cominius had reminded Coriolanus of his friends in the city and reports that:

> His answer to me was,
> He could not stay to pick them in a pile
> Of noisome musty chaff. He said 'twas folly,
> For one poor grain or two, to leave unburnt
> And still to nose th'offense.

—Act V, scene i, lines 24-28

Even at best, with all possible motive, Coriolanus seems to have skirted the edge of madness here, for as Menenius points out:

> For one poor grain or two!
> I am one of those; his mother, wife, his child,

—Act V, scene i, lines 28-29

There seems little hope for penetrating the red veil of madness that has closed over Coriolanus' vengeful mind. Cominius says:

> … all hope is vain
> Unless his noble mother and his wife,
> Who (as I hear) mean to solicit him
> For mercy to his country.

—Act V, scene i, lines 70-74

> Wife, mother, child…

Even this faint possibility seems to wither. Menenius is urged to try his luck with Coriolanus, but he is thrust scornfully away and Coriolanus denies that anyone, even his dearest, can sway him. He says to Menenius:

> Wife, mother, child, I know not.
> My affairs Are servanted to others.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 83-84

Has Coriolanus the strength to turn against his own mother? Perhaps, but only because he has a substitute. He remains the little boy who must have parental approval. Having brutally turned away Menenius, he turns to Aufidius and seeks approval with what might almost be a simper:

> This man, Aufidius,
> Was my beloved in Rome; yet thou behold'st.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 93-94

Aufidius knows his man. Gravely, he gives him what he wants and tells him he is a good boy:

> You keep a constant temper.

—Act V, scene ii, line 95

> … I'll speak a little

But now the women come: his wife, his mother, the fair Valeria. His young son is also there.

Coriolanus kneels to his mother, but holds firm, saying:

> Do not bid me
> Dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate
> Again with Rome's mechanics.

Tell me not Wherein I seem unnatural.
Desire not T'allay my rages and revenges with
Your colder reasons.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 81-86

He is determined to place his own grievances above Rome and wishes to cancel his mother's arguments even before she makes them.

But now Volumnia, in a speech of noble eloquence, shows that she places Rome before him and herself. Too late she tries to teach him that life is not a matter of blows and rages alone; that there are softer and nobler virtues:

Think'st thou it honorable for a noble man
Still [always] to remember wrongs?

—Act V, scene iii, lines 154-55

And when Coriolanus remains obdurate, she rises to return to Rome to die and then uses the one remaining weapon at her disposal, and the most terrible of all:

Come, let us go.
This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
His wife is in Corioles, and his child
Like him by chance. Yet give us our dispatch.
I am hushed until our city be a-fire,
And then I'll speak a little.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 177-82

With a terrible understatement, she makes it clear that when the city is burning, she will call down a dying mother's curse upon her son.

O my mother, mother…

And before this Coriolanus cannot stand. He collapses utterly and

cries out:

> O my mother, mother! O!
> You have won a happy victory to Rome;
> But, for your son-believe it, O, believe it!-
> Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
> If not most mortal to him.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 185-89

He turns away; he will not fight further against Rome; and he asks Au-fidius to make peace. Aufidius is willing to do so. With Coriolanus not in the fight, Rome will be difficult to take. It would be better to make the peace, use the results against Coriolanus, and perhaps fight Rome another time when Coriolanus is not present either to help or to hinder. So much we can assume. Aufidius actually says, in an aside, that he is glad at this development since it will help him ruin Coriolanus.

… made for Alexander

In Rome Menenius is gloomy. He tells an anxious Sicinius that he doesn't think Volumnia will prevail; after all, he himself did not. He describes Coriolanus in the most forbidding terms as nothing but a war machine:

> He sits in his state
> as a thing made for Alexander.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 22-23

He is, in other words, as immobile, as aloof, as untouched by humanity as a statue of Alexander the Great. This is an anachronism, for Alexander lived nearly a century and a half after Coriolanus and died in 323 b.c.

But almost at that moment comes the news that Coriolanus has given in and that the army is gone. Rome goes mad with joy and flocks to the gates to greet Volumnia.

… thou boy of tears

The Volscian army is back in Corioles now and Aufidius is ready

to strike and rid himself of the incubus he had earlier accepted; an incubus that would have been worth its cost if it had brought them the destruction of Rome. But it had not, for, as Aufidius says bitterly:

> … at his nurse's tears
> He whined and roared away your victory;

—Act V, scene vi, lines 97-98

Coriolanus, stupefied, calk on Mars, the god of war, and Aufidius says, with contempt:

> Name not the god, thou boy of tears!

—Act V, scene vi, line 101

For the first time, Coriolanus has been openly called what he is. He is a boy; a tearful, butterfly-killing mamma's boy who never grew up except in muscles; who did all his warlike deeds so that his mother might clap her hands over him; and who broke up at last when his mother said "Bad boy!"

Coriolanus cannot accept Aufidius' sneer because in his heart he knows it is true, and he dare not let himself know it consciously. He keeps repeating that word, shouting:

> "Boy!" False hound!
> If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
> That, like an eagle in a dovecote,
> I Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles.
> Alone I did it. "Boy"?

—Act V, scene vi, lines 113-17

His last boast is of his feat at Corioli in entering the city and fighting *alone*. At the end as at the beginning he is alone in the universe, he with his mother. Is that being a boy, he asks? Of course it is. A foolish act of boyish braggadocio is no less foolish because it succeeds.

And once again, Coriolanus' rage and tactlessness draws down anger upon himself. He is killed by numerous swords that have been prepared for the purpose by Aufidius himself.

The Volscian nobles are taken aback. They regret the sudden

killing without trial, but one says of Coriolanus:

> His own impatience
> Takes from Aufidius a great part of blame.
> Let's make the best of it.

—Act V, scene vi, lines 145-47

It is at this point of the climax of self-ruin that Shakespeare ends the tale.

Plutarch tells a little more. Coriolanus is honorably buried and the city of Rome pays homage to the mother, if not the son, by allowing her to mourn for him the full period of ten months that was then customary.

And at some time, in a future battle, Tullus Aufidius died in arms against Rome. Roman power grew steadily and Volscian power declined, and in the end it was Rome, Rome, Rome, over all Latium, all Italy, all the Mediterranean world.

11. The Tragedy of Julius Caesar

The first Plutarchian play (see page I-213) written by Shakespeare (probably in 1599) concerned the time four and a half centuries after Coriolanus. Rome had survived the Gallic sack and the onslaught of Hannibal of Carthage. It had spread itself west and east over the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and now all those shores were either Roman territory or under the control of some Roman puppet king.

But Rome's troubles were coming from within. There was no longer any serious question of conquest from without. That was impossible and would remain impossible for several centuries. Now, however, there had come an inner struggle. For half a century there had been a sputtering string of conflicts, between generals, for control, and the play opens when the conflict seems to have been decided.

The victor is the greatest Roman of them all-Julius Caesar.

.. .get you home

The events of the first scene, in the streets of the city of Rome, are those of October 45 b.c. Caesar has just returned from Spain, where he defeated the last armies of those adversaries that had stood out against him.

He was now undisputed master of all the Roman realm, from end to end of the Mediterranean Sea. It seemed Rome was ready now to experience a rich and prosperous period of peace under the great Julius.

Not all of Rome is delighted by this turn of events, however. Those who had opposed Caesar and his policies might have been beaten into silence, but not into approval-and not even always into silence.

Caesar stood for an utter and thoroughgoing reform of the political system of the Roman Republic, which in the last century had fallen into decay and corruption. In this, he was supported chiefly by the commons and opposed chiefly by the senators and the aristocratic families.

In the first scene, though, Shakespeare pictures not the aristocratic opposition, but that of a pair of tribunes, Flavius and Marullus. This is odd, for the office of tribune was originally established to protect the commons against the aristocrats (an event which is at the core of the events in *Cor-iolanus,* see page I-222). One would have thought they would be more likely to support Caesar than oppose him.

Actually, however, the matter of the tribunes is borrowed by Shakespeare from Plutarch, but is moved earlier in time. If the incident had been left in its Plutarchian place, it would have seemed more apt.

At any rate, in Shakespeare's version the populace is swarming out to greet the homecoming Caesar, when they are met by the tribunes. One of them, Flavius, cries out:

> Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home!
>
> —Act I, scene i, line 1
>
> … rejoice in his triumph

One of the populace, a cobbler, explains the activity:

> … indeed, sir, we make holiday to see Caesar
> and to re joice in his triumph.
>
> —Act I, scene i, lines 33-34

The "triumph" was an old Roman custom borrowed from the ancient Etruscans centuries before Caesar's time. A victorious general entered the city in state, preceded by government officials and followed by his army and captured prisoners. The procession moved along decorated streets and between lines of cheering spectators to the Capitol, where religious services were held. (It was rather analogous to the modem ticker tape procession down Fifth Avenue.)

The day was a high festival, with plenty of food and drink for all at government expense, so that the populace was delighted partly with the aura of victory and partly with the fun. For the general himself, it represented the highest possible honor.

In My 46 b.c., more than a year before the play opens, Caesar had returned to Rome after nine years of conquest in Gaul and three years of civil war in Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Africa. He had then broken all public records for magnificence by holding four triumphs, one after another, over each of four sets of foreign enemies he had conquered. These were the Gauls, the Egyptians, the Pontines of Asia Minor, and the Numid-ians of Africa.

After that, he went to Spain for one last victorious battle and now

he was returning for one last triumph.

What tributaries …

The cobbler's reply but further irritates the tribune Marullus, who cries out in anguish:

Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?
What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?

—Act I, scene i, lines 35-37

Marullus has a point here. The whole purpose of a triumph was to demonstrate the victories of Romans over their non-Roman enemies-over foreigners. Civil wars in themselves could bring no true conquests; Roman fought Roman so that a Roman victory necessarily implied a Roman defeat as well and a triumph was impossible.

Caesar, in the course of the civil war, had beaten armies under Roman generals, but he had been careful not to celebrate such victories in specific triumphs. He had brought as prisoners only foreigners who had fought against him, even when these (the Numidians, for instance) had been fighting as allies of Roman factions and even though the Roman soldiers who opposed him bore the brunt of the defeat.

In his last battle in Spam, however, there were no foreign enemies. He had fought only Romans and if he had a triumph it could be only over Romans. He did not bring home a true "conquest," no true "tributaries," and why, therefore, a triumph?

Knew you not Pompey.. .

The tribunes can be even more specific. Marullus says:

Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,
To tow'rs and windows, yea, to chimney tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The livelong day, with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.

—Act I, scene i, lines 40-45

Gnaeus Pompeius (usually known as Pompey to English-speaking people) was born in 106 b.c. and made a great name for himself as a general at quite an early age, largely because of his talent for being on the right side in the right place at the right time. He won important victories in Spain, for instance, in 77 b.c. against a rebellious Roman general, largely because that general happened to be assassinated at the crucial moment.

He was given the right to append "Magnus" ("the Great") to his name as a result of early victories, which accounts for the tribune's reference to "great Pompey."

In 67 b.c. he accomplished something really surprising. Pirates had been infesting the Mediterranean Sea for a long time. They had evaded all Roman force and had all but made trade impossible, when Pompey was called to the task of suppressing them. He was put in charge of the entire Mediterranean coast to a distance of fifty miles inland for three years and was told to use that time for destroying the pirates. He managed to clear them all out in three months!

He was then put in charge of the Roman armies in Asia Minor. Again, this was a tremendous piece of luck for him. An earlier Roman general, competent but unpopular, had almost completed the job when his troops rebelled. Pompey took over, cleared up the last remaining forces of the enemy, and got all the credit.

In 61 b.c. he returned to Rome and at the age of forty-five received the most magnificent triumph Rome had seen up to that time. It is presumably partly with reference to this triumph that the tribunes spoke of the people waiting to see the great Pompey.

Pompey was not of a great aristocratic family himself and would have been proud to be accepted by the senators as one of their own. The senators, however, had learned from experience that successful generals of the non-aristocratic classes could be dangerous, and they watched Pompey carefully.

Yet Pompey had done his best to earn senatorial approval. On returning to Italy in 61 b.c. after his victories, he had disbanded his army and had taken his place in Rome as a private citizen. This had merely gained him a total loss of influence. He could not even persuade the Senate to approve the award of bonuses to his faithful soldiers.

Pompey was forced to turn elsewhere. He formed an alliance with Marcus Licinius Crassus, the richest man in Rome, and with a skillful and charming orator and politician, Julius Caesar. Caesar was then an impoverished aristocrat (who nevertheless opposed the Senators) in

the employ of Crassus.

The three together, in 60 b.c., formed the First Triumvirate *(triumvir* means "three men") and ruled Rome.

The three took advantage of their power to parcel out provinces for themselves. Caesar, born in 100 b.c., and by far the most capable of the three, obtained for himself the governorship of that portion of Gaul ruled by Rome (a portion that included what is now northern Italy and southern France). He used that as a base from which to conquer the rest of Gaul. Fighting his first battles at the age of forty-four, he surprised everyone by showing himself to be a military genius of the first rank.

Pompey, who was assigned the governorship of Spain, but who let deputies run it while he himself remained in Rome, was not entirely pleased by Caesar's sudden development of a military reputation. As for Crassus, he was jealous enough to take an army to the east to fight the Parthians, who ruled over what had once been the eastern part of the Persian Empire. In 53 b.c. he lost a catastrophic battle to them at Carrhae, and lost his life as well.

Pompey and Caesar now shared the power, with no third party to serve as intermediary.

By now the senatorial conservatives, frightened by Caesar's success and recognizing Pompey as far the less dangerous of the two, had lined up solidly behind the latter.

Pompey, flattered by aristocratic attentions, let himself be wooed into open opposition to his erstwhile ally. When Caesar's term as governor of Gaul came to an end, the Senate, buoyed up by Pompey's support, arrogantly ordered Caesar to return to Rome at once without his army. This was technically in order since it was treason for any Roman general to bring a provincial army into Italy.

Caesar, however, knew that if he arrived in Rome without his army, he would be arrested at once on some charge or other, and might well be executed.

So after hesitating at the Rubicon River (the little Italian creek which was the boundary of Italy proper, in the Roman view) he made his decision. On January 10, 49 b.c., he crossed the Rubicon with a legion of troops and a civil war began.

Pompey found, much to his own surprise, that Caesar was far more popular than he, and that soldiers flocked to Caesar and not to himself. He was forced to flee to Greece and the senatorial party fled with him. Caesar followed and at a battle in Pharsalia, Greece, on June 29, 48 b.c., Caesar's army smashed that of Pompey.

Pompey had to flee again, almost alone, to Egypt, which was then still independent of Rome. The Egyptian government, however, was afraid to do anything that might displease Caesar, who was clearly the

coming man. They therefore assassinated Pompey the instant he landed on Egyptian soil.

Caesar followed, and remained in Egypt for a while. There he met Cleopatra, its fascinating young queen.

Caesar next traveled to Asia Minor, and then to Africa, to defeat die-hard armies allied to those who shared the views of the dead Pompey and the senatorial party. Only then did he return to Rome for his quadruple triumph.

… Pompey's blood

In no part of that quadruple triumph did Caesar commemorate his victory over Pompey himself. In fact, as a deliberate stroke of policy, Caesar forgave such of the Pompeian partisans as he could and did his best to erase hard feelings. His mission, as far as possible, was to unite Rome and put an end to the civil broils through conciliation.

And yet the Roman tribunes in their harangue to the populace bring up Pompey, reproachfully, in connection with this last triumph of Caesar, and Marullus says to the gathered people:

> And do you now put on your best attire?
> And do you now cull out a holiday?
> And do you now strew flowers in his way
> That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?

—Act I, scene i, lines 51-54

By "Pompey's blood" is not meant Pompey's death in defeat, as might seem, but Pompey's kinsmen.

Pompey had two sons, the elder of whom shared his father's name and was Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus also. We can call him Gnaeus Pompeius to differentiate him from his father, whom we can still call simply Pompey.

Gnaeus Pompeius remained with the senatorial party after his father's death. He had a fleet in his charge and he brought it to Africa (where the modern nation of Tunis exists), putting it at the service of the largest remaining senatorial army. When Caesar defeated it in April 47 b.c., Gnaeus Pompeius escaped to Spain.

After the quadruple triumph, only Spam was left in opposition. Caesar took his legions there and in March 45 b.c. a battle took place at Munda in southern Spain.

The senatorial army fought remarkably well and Caesar's forces

were driven back. For a time, indeed, Caesar must have thought that years of invariable victory were going to be brought to ruin in one last battle (as had been the case of Hannibal of Carthage a century and a half earlier). So desperate was he that he seized a shield and sword himself, rushed into battle (he was fifty-five years old then), and shouted to his retreating men, "Are you going to let your general be delivered up to the enemy?"

Stung into action, the retiring legions lunged forward once more and carried the day. The last senatorial army was wiped out. Gnaeus Pompeius escaped from the field of battle, but was pursued, caught, and killed. (Pompey's younger son escaped and lived to play a part in the events that took place some six years later, and in another of Shakespeare's plays, *Antony and Cleopatra.)*

Now, returning from Spain, Caesar was celebrating Ms victory over Gnaeus Pompeius and it was in this sense that he came in "triumph over Pompey's blood."

> … the feast of Lupercal

The populace disbands and leaves the stage, presumably returning to their houses in guilt. The tribune, Flavius, then suggests that they tear down the decorations intended for the triumph. Marullus hesitates, for it may be sacrilege. He says:

> May we do so?
> You know it is the feast of Lupercal.

—Act I, scene i, lines 69-70

The Lupercalian festival was an ancient fertility rite whose origins are lost in antiquity and probably predate civilization. It involved the ritual sacrifice of goats, which were noted for being ruttish animals.

Strips of the skin of the sacrificed goats were cut off by the priests in charge. They then ran about the Palatine Hill, striking out with those thongs. Anyone struck would be rendered fertile, supposedly, and sterile women therefore so placed themselves at the rites as to make sure they would be struck.

The "feast of Lupercal" was held each year on February 15 and this was not the day of Caesar's last triumph at all (as would appear from the play), but four months later. Shakespeare, however, commonly compresses time in his historical plays (a compression that is a dramatic necessity, and even a dramatic virtue), and here he lets

the four months pass between the driving off of the populace and the next speech of the tribunes. There is no further talk of the triumph.

One would suppose from this first scene that the triumph was somehow aborted and never took place. It *did* take place, of course. The chief point of the scene is to show that there is opposition to Caesar.

> … in servile fearfulness

Flavius shrugs off the possibility of sacrilege. It is more important to resist Caesar's pretensions. He says:

> These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing
> Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
> Who else would soar above the view of men
> And keep us all in servile fearfulness.

—Act I, scene i, lines 75-78

The battle in Caesar's time did not really involve liberty in our modern sense. On the one hand was a time-honored but distorted and corrupt senatorial government, inefficient and dying. On the other was the one-man dictatorship of Julius Caesar, intent on fundamental reform and a centralized government.

There would have been no freedom for the common people anywhere, even in Rome, under either form of government. Under Caesar, however, the government would certainly have been more efficient and the realm more prosperous. That this is so is demonstrated by the fact that when Caesar's heir and successor founded a Caesar-type government (the Roman Empire), it led to two centuries of unbroken peace and prosperity.

During that peaceful tune, however, literary men had leisure to look back on the decades before the establishment of the Empire and to regret the hurly-burly of politics and the active drama of contending personalities. It seemed to them that they and their senatorial patrons lived in a gilded prison (and indeed the senators sometimes suffered, when suspicious emperors suspected treason among them). It became fashionable to look back with nostalgic sadness to the days of the Roman Republic.

The senatorial party of Caesar's time then came to be called "Republicans" and to be viewed as exponents of "liberty." They were entirely idealized and in this fashion were passed on to Shakespeare

and to us. We need not be deluded, however. The senatorial notion of "liberty" was the liberty of a small group of venal aristocrats to plunder the state unchecked.

Calphurnia

The scene shifts now to another part of Rome, where Caesar and many with him are on their way to attend the Lupercalian rites. Caesar's first word in the play is to call his wife:

Calphurnia!

—Act I, scene ii, line 1

Caesar had three wives altogether. He married his first wife in 83 b.c. when he was not yet seventeen. She was the daughter of a radical antisena-torial politician, and it was from this connection, probably, that Caesar began to get his own antisenatorial philosophy. When Caesar's father-in-law was killed and the conservatives gamed control and initiated a blood-bath (the radicals had had their turn previously), Caesar was ordered to divorce his wife. He refused! It might have then gone hard with him as a result, but the young man's aristocratic connections saved his life.

Caesar's first wife died in 67 b.c. and he made a politically convenient second marriage, taking as wife Pompeia, the daughter of Pompey, who was then at the height of his career.

In 62 b.c. a certain young scapegrace named Publius Clodius (called "Pulcher" or "good-looking") played a rather foolish practical joke. He dressed himself in women's clothing and got himself into Caesar's house at a time when a religious festival was in process which only women could attend.

He was caught and it was a great scandal. Many whispered that it could not have been done without the co-operation of Pompeia and even wondered if Clodius might not be Pompeia's lover. Pompeia was almost certainly innocent, but Caesar divorced her at once with the famous remark that "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion." Actually, he was probably tired of her and was glad of a face-saving excuse for the divorce.

After Caesar had formed the triumvirate with Pompey and Crassus, he married again, for the third and last tune, to Calpurnia (or Calphurnia, as Shakespeare calls her). She was a daughter of one of Pompey's friends, and it was therefore, in a sense, another political

marriage.

> … in Antonius' way Caesar has a simple direction for Calphurnia:
> Stand you directly in Antonius' way When he doth run his course.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 3-4

Antonius, it seems, will be one of those who will race along wielding the goat-hide thongs at the Lupercalian festival. Since Calphurnia has had no children, and Caesar would like a direct heir, it will be useful for her to be struck.

The Antonius referred to is Marcus Antonius, far better known, in English, as Mark Antony. He was born in 83 b.c. and was thirty-eight years old at the time of this Lupercalian festival. He was related to Julius Caesar on his mother's side and had joined the general while he was in Gaul. He had remained loyally pro-Caesar ever since.

Mark Antony had been tribune in 49 b.c. when Pompey and the Senate were trying to force Julius Caesar to come to Italy without his army. Mark Antony and his fellow tribune did what they could to block senatorial action, then fled to Caesar's army, claiming they were in danger of their lives. Since tribunes were inviolate and might not be harmed, Caesar had the excuse he needed to cross the Rubicon with his army.

While Caesar was in Greece and Egypt fighting the civil war, Mark Antony held the fort in Rome itself and didn't do a very good job of it.

Caesar continued to value him for his absolute loyalty, however, and they remained together to the end.

> … the ides of March

And then a voice calls Caesar's name. It is a soothsayer, a man who foresees the future. This time his message is a simple one:

> Beware the ides of March.

—Act I, scene ii, line 18

To understand the matter of "the ides" we must consider the Roman calendar, which must set some sort of record for inconvenience.

Each of the Roman months has three key dates and the other days are defined as "so many days before the such-and-such key date." Nor are the key dates regularly spaced or quite the same from month to month.

The first day of each month is the "calends" of that month.

Not long after the calends come the "nones." The nones fall on the fifth day of January, February, April, June, August, September, November, and December, and on the seventh day of March, May, July, and October.

The word "nones" means "nine" because it falls nine days before the third key date, the "ides," where the nine days count the day of the ides itself. The ides, therefore, fall on the fifteenth day of March, May, July, and October, and on the thirteenth day of the other months.

From all this we gather that the "ides of March" is what we could call March 15 today. The Lupercalian festival, which falls on February 15, is not, however, on the "ides of February," for that date would be what we now call February 13.

I am not gamesome…

Calmly, Caesar ignores the mystic warning and passes on to the festival. The incident of the soothsayer is not a Shakespearean invention, but is referred to in Plutarch.

That, of course, does not necessarily make it authentic. The event of the ides of March was so dramatic and so clearly a turning point of history that numerous fables arose afterward of all sorts of supernatural omens and forebodings preceding it. The incident of the soothsayer is only the most restrained and dramatically satisfying one of them.

After Caesar and his party pass on, two men remain behind: Brutus and Cassius. Cassius asks if Brutus intends to watch the festival and Brutus says he won't, for:

/ am not gamesome: I do lack some part
Of that quick spirit that is in Antony.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 28-29

No, he is not gamesome (that is, "merry" or "gay"). The Romans,

somehow, usually aren't in literature. They are generally presented as grave, portentous, dignified men, given to declamations in high-sounding phrases, and that is exactly how Brutus is presented.

He is Marcus Junius Brutus, born in 85 b.c., and therefore just past forty at this time.

Brutus was the "Republican" most idealized by later historians, but he was by no means an admirable character in real life.

To begin with, he was a nephew of Cato, one of Caesar's most obdurate and steadfast enemies. It is not surprising, then, that Brutus was also an enemy of Caesar's to begin with. Indeed, he fought on Pompey's side in Greece and was taken prisoner when Pompey was defeated.

Caesar, however, followed a consistent policy of leniency toward his enemies, feeling, perhaps, that in this way he converted them to friends and healed the wounds inflicted by civil war. So Brutus was pardoned and set free.

The policy seemed to have worked in Brutus' case, for he behaved as though he were converted from a Pompeian into a sincere Caesarian. When Caesar went to Africa to take care of the senatorial armies there, those had, as one of their most important leaders, Cato, who was Brutus' uncle. And yet Brutus remained one of Caesar's lieutenants and served him loyally in the province of Cisalpine Gaul (in what is now northern Italy).

Later on, crucially and fatally, he abandoned Caesar once again. The later idealization of Brutus has him acting out of conviction and principle, but a glance at his career before the opening scenes of *Julius Caesar* would make it seem that he was, rather, a self-serving turncoat.

> … Cassias.. .

Brutus is unwilling that his lack of gamesomeness should interfere with Cassius' pleasures. He says:

> Let me not hinder, Cassius, your desires;
> I'll leave you.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 30-31

Cassius' full name is Gaius (or Caius) Cassius Longinus, and he is a capable soldier. He went with Crassus to the East as second-in-command. After the disastrous defeat which almost destroyed the Roman army, thanks in good part to Crassus' incapacity, Cassius took

over and brought what was left of the army safely back to Roman territory.

He was also with Pompey at first, but after Pompey's defeat he reassessed the situation. He had not been captured, but it seemed to him that Caesar was sure to win, and Cassius intended to be on the winning side. He followed Caesar into Asia Minor and threw himself on the conqueror's mercy. Caesar pardoned him and let him serve under him.

Cassius married Junia, the sister of Brutus, and was, therefore, Brutus' brother-in-law.

> Your hidden worthiness…

But now that Brutus makes ready to leave Cassius, Cassius gently restrains him. He has a use for Brutus and to serve that use he begins, carefully, to seduce him with praise. He tells Brutus that he is too modest and does not sufficiently value himself, saying:

> … it is very much lamented, Brutus,
> That you have no such mirrors as will turn
> Your hidden worthiness into your eye,
> That you might see your shadow.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 35-38

Somehow the general idealization of Brutus is such that most of those who read or see this play imagine that Brutus is presented in heroic colors; and, indeed, the play is often produced with Brutus as the hero. Yet a close reading seems to show that Shakespeare is utterly out of sympathy with Brutus and makes him rather a despicable character.

Cassius bemoans Brutus' modesty, but there is no modesty in Brutus as portrayed by Shakespeare. Brutus always listens complacently to those who praise him, and praises himself often enough. Nor does Cassius for a moment really believe that Brutus is modest, for in the rest of the scene his attempt to win over Brutus to a desired line of action is pitched entirely to Brutus' overweening vanity.

> … Caesar for their king

Cassius' smoothly scheming flattery is interrupted by the sound of shouting in the distance, and Brutus cries out:

> What means this shouting? I do fear the people
> Choose Caesar for their king.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 79-80

The word "king" had a dread sound to Romans throughout their great days, a dread that dated back to the hated Tarquin (see page I-211). The tale of Tarquin was a heritage of every Roman schoolboy, as the tale of George III is of every American schoolboy, and a stanch republicanism was inculcated in the former case as it is in the latter.

Then too, in the two centuries preceding Julius Caesar's period of power, Rome had been more or less continuously at war with the various Hellenistic nations of the eastern Mediterranean, all of which were ruled by kings. Kings were the enemy and were therefore hated; and the kings were always defeated by the Roman republicans, so that the institution of monarchy had the aura of defeat about it.

Consequently, Caesar was in a dilemma when he took power over Rome. He simply had to reform the government, which had come to be utterly stagnant and unworkable, but he could not do so by ordinary legal means. That would require working through the Senate, and the Senate was hostile and obstructionist. Hence, he had to rule dictatorially, by decree.

The Roman system of government allowed for rule by decree under certain conditions. A special official could be elected for six months who would have the power to rule by decree. He was a "dictator" (from a Latin word meaning "to say," because what he said became law without further ado). A famous early (and legendary) dictator was Cincinnatus, who in 458 b.c. held the dictatorship for only a few days to meet an emergency.

In later times the device was broadened. In 81 b.c. the Roman general Lucius Cornelius Sulla made himself dictator and held the post for two years. This was with the connivance of the Senate, whose cause Sulla favored.

Caesar took advantage of the broadening and turned it against the Senate. He had taken the power of a dictator during the civil war and at the time of the quadruple triumph had had himself declared dictator for a term of ten years. After the Spanish triumph, which opens this play, he was made dictator for life.

He used the dictatorship to bring about his program of reform. He tried to reform the Senate by wrenching it out of the hands of the few

oligarchs who monopolized it and allowing the entry of important families from the provinces. He broadened the base of citizenship, revised the taxation procedure, reconstructed cities, improved trade, passed laws designed to strengthen the moral structure of society, and reformed the calendar so that it was almost the one we use today. He even established the first public library.

Yet although he was dictator for life, Caesar felt it was not enough. As merely dictator, his death would be the sign for a new struggle for power, and all his reforms would be undone. That placed a premium on his death and made his opponents eager for an assassination. If he were king, however, Ms power would merely descend to his nearest heir upon his death, and there would be far less point to killing him.

It was this desire of Caesar to make himself king-a desire imputed to him by the senatorial conservatives, and probably justly so-that was the chief weapon against him. The conservatives, who hated him and his reforms, emphasized his ambition for the kingship, hoping that the hated word would turn the populace against Caesar.

On the other hand, the conservatives also feared that the popularity of his reforms might more than make up for the fearsomeness of the word, and that the infatuated populace, caught up on the occasion of some holiday such as the present Lupercalian festival, would be stampeded into declaring him king and that the Senate would then be forced, much against its will, to go along. Once that was done, it would be too late to expect to turn back the tide of reform.

It was exactly this that Brutus feared when he heard the shouting.

> … the waves of Tiber

Brutus' outspoken fear of Caesar as king heartens Cassius. He plays on that fear by describing the indignity of having to bow down to one who after all is but a man and perhaps not even as good a man as oneself. To make his point, he tells a tale of a contest between himself and Caesar.

One cold day Caesar challenged Cassius to swim across the river. Caesar wearied first and cried out for help. Cassius says:

> I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
> Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
> The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
> Did I the tired Caesar.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 112-15

The Tiber River is 252 miles long and is the second longest river in Italy. It would bear little distinction as a river were it not that, like some other short rivers, such as the Thames, the Seine, and the Spree, a great capital was located on its banks. The city of Rome was founded twenty miles upstream from its mouth.

Here again there is a reference to Aeneas as the ancestor of the Romans (see page I-20).

Like a Colossus.. . In all Cassius' clever speaking, he doesn't once accuse Caesar of tyrannical behavior or of cruelty; he doesn't say his reforms are wicked or evil.

He concentrates entirely on Caesar's physical weakness and poor health, for he is endeavoring to show Brutus that Caesar is inferior, hoping that Brutus' inordinate vanity would then rebel at bowing down to such a ruler.

He labors to find a way to describe the greatness of Caesar and the comparative littleness of Brutus in such a way as to force Brutus to rebel. Cassius says:

> Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs and peep about
> To find ourselves dishonorable graves.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 135-38

The Colossus is a statue of the sun god built in the island of Rhodes in 280 b.c. to commemorate the successful defense against a siege by a Macedonian general, Demetrius. Why the name "colossus" was applied to a huge statue is unknown, but this Rhodian statue, the largest in the Greco-Roman world, 105 feet tall, was *the* Colossus of Rhodes. It was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

It did not, however, remain long to gladden the eyes of those who value size in art. In 224 b.c., little more than half a century after it had been built, it was toppled by an earthquake.

Once it was gone, the description of what it had looked like while it was standing gradually grew more grandiose, until finally the tale arose that it had straddled Rhodes' harbor and that ships had sailed between its legs in and out of that harbor. This is, of course, quite impossible, for the ancient Greeks had lacked the materials and

technique to build a statue so large in a position that would place so much strain on the legs.

The picture is nevertheless a dramatic one, and Cassius, by whose time the statue had been out of existence for nearly two centuries, uses it to fire up Brutus' vanity and envy.

… a Brutus once…

Cassius plays on Brutus' pride of ancestry too, saying:

There was a Brutus once that would have brooked
Th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 159-61

Brutus considers himself to be descended from Lucius Junius Brutus, who, according to legend, helped overthrow King Tarquin and set up the Roman Republic (see page I-211).

… and Cicero

Brutus' vanity is not proof against Cassius' skilful seduction, and he admits that he resents Rome's present situation.

Before matters can go further, though, Caesar comes back onstage, returning from the festival with others crowding around him.

Caesar is clearly angry and those about him look perturbed. Brutus, surprised at this, says to Cassius:

Calphurnia's cheek is pale, and Cicero
Looks with such ferret and such fiery eyes
As we have seen him in the Capitol,
Being crossed in conference by some senators.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 185-88

Marcus Tullius Cicero, though he plays only a small part in this play, was actually the most important man in Rome in Caesar's time, next to Caesar himself.

He was born in 106 b.c. of middle-class family and received an

excellent education in Greece. He returned to Rome in 77 b.c. and quickly became Rome's outstanding lawyer and orator (the two went together). He made himself famous by prosecuting one of the particularly crooked Roman provincial governors of the time, Gaius Verres, in 74 b.c.

In 63 b.c. he reached the pinnacle of his career when, as consul, he scotched a dangerous conspiracy against the Roman government by a debt-ridden nobleman, Lucius Sergius Catilina (known in English as Catiline), and had its leaders executed.

He never reached such heights again. He was not brave enough or skillful enough to be an effective opponent of Caesar. In fact, Caesar had his lackey, Publius Clodius (the same who invaded the women's religious festival and made it possible for Caesar to divorce his second wife), to so vilify and harass Cicero as to drive the latter out of Italy altogether in 59 b.c.

Mark Antony had an undying hatred for Cicero, since Antony's foster father had been an associate of Catiline and had been among those executed at the instigation of Cicero. Cicero returned the hatred.

Cicero was a friend of Pompey, who, he thought, would be able to dominate Rome and defeat Caesar. When Pompey found he could not retain Italy and fled to Greece, Cicero, greatly disconcerted, left Italy with him. Cicero grew more and more disturbed at developments among the Pompeian forces and after the Battle of Pharsalia returned to Italy, determined to take a chance on Caesar's mercy rather than fight on with the remnants of a doomed cause. Caesar did not disappoint him; he pardoned Cicero and treated him kindly. Thereafter, Cicero displayed a wary neutrality, neither opposing Caesar's reforms openly nor supporting them, either.

Cicero was a debater rather than a warrior, and he was at home in the battle of words in the Senate rather than in the battle of swords on the field. Hence his angry red eyes (a ferret's eyes are red) reminded Brutus of his appearance when he was opposed in senatorial debate.

> … always I am Caesar

But even while Brutus and Cassius observe Caesar and his company in astonishment, Caesar is observing them as well. He remarks upon Cassius, particularly, to Antony, in a famous and much quoted passage:

> Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
> He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 194-95

But after elaborating on Cassius' gravity and on his inability to have fun and thus allow his possible feelings of envy to evaporate in pleasure, Caesar adds hastily:

> I rather tell thee what is to be feared
> Than what I /ear; for always I am Caesar.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 211-12

Caesar, as portrayed by Shakespeare, strikes wooden poses constantly. He is like a speaking statue, rather than a human being.

This is not and cannot be historical. All our sources seem to unite in assuring us that Caesar had infinite charm and could win over almost anyone, given half a chance. He was second only to Cicero as an orator and his surviving *Commentaries,* in which he describes his wars in Gaul and the civil war, are ample evidence of his ability as a writer.

He was a remarkably witty and intelligent man; a most human man. He was miles removed from the cardboard strutter in Shakespeare and was in real life much more like George Bernard Shaw's portrayal of him in *Caesar and Cleopatra.*

Why does Shakespeare portray him so woodenly then? Unfortunately, it was the fashion to describe ancient Romans like that. This fashion stems from the plays of the Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who wrote about a century after Caesar's death. His are among the most fustian plays ever written, full of emotional sound and fury, blood and horror, and empty, high-sounding speeches.

The general public loved them so that they survived to be copied, alas, by playwrights in early modern times. Shakespeare himself wrote tragedies after the style of Seneca, notably *Titus Andronicus* (see page I-391).

A French poet, Marc Antoine Muret, wrote a tragedy entitled *Julius Caesar* in Latin in 1553. He followed the style of Seneca and made Caesar into a wooden poseur. This was popular too, and one theory is that when Shakespeare wrote his tragedy, he had to keep Caesar in this form because the audience expected it and would not accept any other version.

We might imagine that Shakespeare did so against his will, for he follows Caesar's pompous claim to fearlessness with an immediate confession of weakness on the part of the great man. Caesar goes on to

say to Mark Antony:

> Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
> And tell me truly what thou think'st of him.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 213-14

> … a crown offered him…

Caesar and his followers leave again, but one remains behind, held back by Brutus. The man stopped is Casca, who is pictured by Shakespeare as a rough, coarse individual, the kind who has no "book learning" and is proud of it. He is Publius Servilius Casca in full, and his only mark in history is his participation in the conspiracy which Cassius is now working up.

Casca is asked as to the events at the festival that caused Caesar to look so put out. Casca says:

> Why, there was a crown offered him; and being offered him,
> he put it by with the back of his hand, thus;
> and then the people fell a-shouting.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 220-22

Apparently Mark Antony took the occasion of the festival, when public spirits were high, and enthusiasm for Dictator Julius was loud, to offer him a linen headband wreathed in laurel. The laurel wreath was well within the Roman tradition. It was a symbol of victory, borrowed from the Greek custom of crowning the victors of the Olympian games in laurel wreaths.

The linen headband was, however, a "diadem," the symbol of monarchy among the kings of the East. For Caesar to put on this particular laurel wreath was tantamount to claiming the position of king. (In later times, gold replaced linen and it was a gold circlet, or crown, that became the symbol of royalty. Shakespeare transmutes the diadem into a crown so that the audience might understand.)

Caesar's stratagem seems obvious. The diadem is made to look as harmless and as Roman as possible by means of the laurel decoration. Ostentatiously, he refuses it, hoping that the crowd, in its enthusiasm, will demand that he accept it. Caesar would then graciously accede to their clamor and become king by the will of the people.

Unfortunately, the crowd did not react this way. Instead of demanding he accept the diadem, they cheered him for refusing it. Twice more Mark Antony tried, and twice more the crowd cheered the refusal. No wonder Caesar had looked angry. His stratagem had failed and he had come close to making a fool of himself.

To Cassius and others of his mind, the intention behind the stratagem is obvious. Caesar wanted to be king and if the trick today had failed, another tomorrow might not-and this must be stopped at all costs.

… foamed at mouth. ..

Caesar's anger and disappointment are described most graphically by Casca. He relates that after the third refusal, Caesar:

> … fell down in the market place, and foamed at mouth,
> and was speechless.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 252-53

In short, he had had an epileptic fit. The tale that Caesar was an epileptic may not be a reliable one, however. The Roman historian Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus wrote a scandal-filled set of biographies of the early Roman emperors a century and a half after Caesar's time, and he said that Caesar had twice had "the falling sickness" in the time of battle. It is always doubtful how far one can believe Suetonius, however.

Shakespeare has Casca make another notable comment, meant literally, which has become a very byword in the language. Asked if Cicero said anything, he answered that Cicero had spoken in Greek:

> … those that understood him smiled at one another
> and shook their heads; but for mine own part, it was
> Greek to me.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 282-84

> … put to silence Casca then says:
> / could tell you more news too :
> Marullus and Flavius, for pulling scarfs off
> Caesar's images, are put to silence.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 284-86

Marullus and Flavius are the tribunes of the first scene and this seems to hark back to their activities at the Spanish triumph months before. Actually, their activities then are purely Shakespearean and have no source in history.

Plutarch associates them, rather, with the incident at the Lupercalian festival. After the refusal of the diadem, someone apparently placed it on the head of a statue of Caesar, as though he were still trying to fire the Roman populace with enthusiasm for Caesar as king. One of the tribunes plucked it off and the people cheered him, and that is the germ for Shakespeare's first scene.

Shakespeare says the tribunes were "put to silence," which sounds almost as though they were executed. Plutarch, however, merely says they were turned out of their office.

… he loves Brutus

Casca leaves, and then Brutus. Cassius is left alone to smile grimly and remark in soliloquy at how easy Brutus is to handle:

Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see
Thy honorable mettle may be wrought
From that it is disposed…

—Act I, scene ii, lines 308-10

Brutus is constantly being called honorable and noble throughout the play, yet he never seems so in action. Not only is he vain and envious, but he is rather stupid too. Cassius plans to throw letters into Brutus' window, disguised in various hands, all praising him and calling him to save the state. He is certain that Brutus' colossal vanity and less than colossal intelligence will make this rather childish stratagem a success.

Why should Cassius want such a vain fool as Brutus on his side? Can Brutus be trusted not to ruin any conspiracy of which he forms a part? (Actually, no, for his vain folly ruins this one, as Shakespeare makes amply clear.) Cassius gives the answer in his soliloquy:

Caesar doth bear me hard, but he loves Brutus.

—Act I, scene ii, line 313

Later historians emphasized Caesar's partiality toward Brutus since it made succeeding events all the more dramatic. On the other hand, there is one instance which seems to show Caesar's feeling in terms of hard action.

When Caesar first returned in triumph to Rome, Cassius and Brutus both asked for the post of praetor of the city (an office rather like the modern mayor). Caesar granted the post to Brutus, though he is supposed to have admitted that Cassius was the more fit for it.

Caesar's surprising partiality for Brutus and the fact that he was supposed to have once been friendly with Brutus' mother gave rise to the scandalous tale that Brutus was an illegitimate son of Caesar's. However, scandalmongers, then as now, prefer a dramatic guess to a sober fact, and we need not take this very seriously.

However, one can see that Cassius values Brutus partly because through Brutus conspirators may probe Caesar's inner defenses more easily.

… to the Capitol tomorrow

Between the second and third scenes another month passes, unmarked by the onrushing action of the play. Casca meets with Cicero in the third scene. Casca looks wild and, on Cicero's question, Casca tells of numerous supernatural events he has just witnessed. Cicero seems unmoved. He dismisses the tale and asks, practically:

Comes Caesar to the Capitol tomorrow?

—Act I, scene iii, line 36

It is, in other words, the night before the ides of March. It is March 14 and Caesar has called the Senate into session for the next day for some matter of great moment.

Caesar was planning to head eastward with an army to make war on the Parthians, who had destroyed Crassus and most of his army nine years before-a Roman defeat that had as yet gone unavenged. Before Caesar could leave, certain matters had to be cleared up.

One possibility is that Caesar did not want to leave Rome without settling the question of kingship, and that he was calling the Senate into session in order to force them to offer him the crown.

Was this so? Would he really accept a grudged title, then depart from Rome for perhaps an extended period, leaving the city to almost certain war? Might it not be that he was merely calling the Senate into session for a formal declaration of war against the Parthians and for the establishmerit of a kind of "regency" to govern Rome while he was gone? Who can tell now.

The conspirators, however, thought they knew what Caesar planned. They were sure that Caesar was going to make the irrevocable grab for the crown and that there was only one last chance to stop him-before the Senate actually had a chance to meet.

Because they thought so, the next day, March 15, 44 b.c., was to be a key date in world history, and later legend got busy to fill the night before with supernatural portents. It is those legends which Shakespeare incorporates into his play.

Our own materialist age has no difficulty whatever in rejecting out of hand any tales of supernatural occurrences on the night of March 14-15. We can dismiss them even in terms of the Romans themselves. If the eve of the ides had really been so riddled with horror, the conspirators would probably have been cowed from their project by superstition.

> … save here in Italy

Cicero leaves and Cassius enters. He too is full of the prodigies of the night and he begins to sound out Casca's feelings with regard to Caesar. Casca passes on one rumor as to Caesar's plans for the next day:

> Indeed, they say the senators tomorrow
> Mean to establish Caesar as a king;
> And he shall wear his crown by sea and land,
> In every place save here in Italy.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 85-88

Was this Caesar's intention? It seems, on the surface, a reasonable compromise. Italy at that time still ruled the Roman realm, and it was the Italians alone who were Roman citizens, and it was Roman citizens alone who had the traditional objection to monarchy. The

provinces outside Italy lacked the Roman tradition and many of them were, in fact, accustomed to kings. They would accept a King Julius without objection and Italy would continue under Dictator Julius.

It would, however, be a useless compromise as it stood. The permanence of monarchy would exist only in the provinces, which were without military power, while in Italy itself, where lay the control of the armies, Caesar's death would still be the signal for civil war.

What is more likely, if such a compromise were pushed through, is that it would be intended to be temporary. How long after Caesar became king elsewhere would it be before he were king in Italy as well? The Roman populace, accustomed to hearing of Caesar as king, would come to accept him as such.

Unquestionably, those who opposed Caesar and his reforms would realize this, so that any offer to renounce kingship for Italy only would be completely unsatisfactory. The mere thought of it drives Casca to agree to join the conspiracy Cassius is forming.

> 'Tis Cinna…

Another enters. Casca is at once cautious (he is dealing in a dangerous plot which, if it fails, means death). Cassius reassures him:

> Tis Cinna; I do know him by his gait;
> He is a friend.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 132-33

It is Lucius Cornelius Cinna. His father, with the same name, had also been the father of Caesar's first wife. The elder Cinna had been one of Rome's most radical politicians, and had striven against the senatorial government even to the point of leading a revolution. His troops mutinied against him, however, and killed him in 84 b.c. The younger Cinna, however, had now joined the conspiracy against Caesar and in behalf of the senatorial party.

It is amazing how many of the conspirators were in one way or another beholden to Caesar-Brutus most of all. That is probably one reason why the conspiracy succeeded; Caesar considered them all friends.

> … Decius Brutus and Trebonius…

Other conspirators are mentioned. Cinna doesn't recognize Casca at first. He says:

… Who's that? Metellus Cimber?

—Act I, scene iii, line 134

Then, a little later, when Cassius prepares to have the entire group meet at a particular site, he asks:

Is Decius Brutus and Trebonius there?

—Act I, scene iii, line 148

Gaius Trebonius was of the aristocracy, like Caesar, but, again like Caesar, he took an active part in the reform movement and worked hard in the Senate on behalf of measures favored by Caesar. He served as a general under Caesar in the wars in Gaul and in 45 b.c. (just the year before) Trebonius served as consul, the chief magistrate of Rome, thanks to Caesar's influence. To be sure, the consul had little real power while Caesar was dictator, but it was a most honorable position.

As for "Decius Brutus," the name is an error that Shakespeare made in following North's translation of Plutarch, where the same error is to be found. The correct name is Decimus Junius Brutus. He belonged to the same family as did Marcus Junius Brutus, who is *the* Brutus of this play. This second Brutus is referred to as "Decius" throughout the play and I will do so too, since that will conveniently prevent confusion between the two Brutuses.

Decius was another one of Caesar's generals during the Gallic conquest. In fact, he commanded the fleet at one point, and after Caesar's victory he served as governor of Gaul for a couple of years. His relationship to Caesar was so close that the Dictator even named Decius as one of his heirs, in case no member of his own family survived him.

… the noble Brutus. ..

Yet despite the importance of the individuals in the conspiracy, the need is felt for something more. Cinna says:

O Cassius, if you could
But win the noble Brutus to our party-

—Act I, scene iii, lines 140-41

Casca explains a little later:

O, he sits high in all the people's hearts;
And that which would appear offense in us,
His countenance, like richest alchemy,
Will change to virtue and to worthiness.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 157-60

There is another reason why Brutus is desired: to cast a respectable cloak over what otherwise might seem a heinous deed.

But Cassius explains his scheme of deluding "noble" Brutus with fake messages and even has them help in distributing them.

… no personal cause.. .

The scene now shifts to Brutus' house. Brutus has been unable to sleep. He wishes to join the conspiracy, but what he needs is some high-sounding noble reason to do so. He can't admit to the world, or even to himself, that he is being driven to it by Cassius' skillful appeal to his own vanity. He says:

/ know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crowned.
How that might change his nature, there's the question.

—Act II, scene i, lines 11-13

That seems to be the key to the noble cause he seeks-how power might change Caesar. He decides he will

… think him as a serpent's egg
Which hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.

-Act II, scene i, lines 32-34

What Brutus is now thinking of is a kind of preventive assassination. Caesar must be killed not because he is tyrannical but because he may grow tyrannical.

There is appeal in this argument. Power does tend to corrupt, as history has amply proven, and it is tempting to reason that a tyrant is best removed before he has a chance to show that corruption. What if Adolf Hitler had been assassinated in 1932?

And yet, it is a dangerous view. Once we accept the fact that assassination is justified to prevent tyranny rather than to punish it, who would be safe? What ruler could be sure of not being regarded by someone somewhere as being on the high road to tyranny, which he would reach someday?

… Erebus itself …

Brutus has been receiving the faked letters Cassius has prepared for him and he has managed to talk himself into believing in the nobility of the enterprise. It is clear he intends to join the conspiracy and yet he is still uneasy about it.

When the conspirators arrive at his house, cloaked in masks and darkness, he is aware of the intrinsic shame of conspiracy. He apostrophizes personified conspiracy and says it must assume a false front, for

… thy native semblance on,
Not Erebus itself were dim enough
To hide thee from prevention.

-Act II, scene i, lines 83-85

In some of the more poetic tellings of the Greek myths, Erebus is pictured as the son of Chaos, the brother of Night, and the father of the Fates. There are no tales told of him, however, and in poetry he is merely, as here, used as the personification of darkness. (The word is also used, sometimes, to describe an underground region en route to Hades.)

… what of Cicero.. .

The conspirators are now all together and Brutus is formally accepted among their ranks. Should still others be recruited? Cassius asks:

> But what of Cicero? Shall we sound him?
> I think he will stand very strong with us.

—Act II, scene i, lines 141-42

Cicero had a very high reputation in Rome in some ways. In an age of general corruption, Cicero was widely recognized as an honest man of high ideals. He was a true republican and favored republican institutions backed by an honest and upright Senate. He would certainly be opposed to Caesar as king. All agree at once, therefore, that Cicero would be an excellent addition.

All but Brutus, that is, for he says:

> O name him not! Let us not break with [confide in] him;

—Act II, scene i, line 150

According to Plutarch's tale, Cicero was not approached because it was felt he lacked the necessary resolution and might, in a pinch, betray the conspiracy.

And, indeed, although he was personally upright, he was indeed a physical coward and could not, through most of his life, face actual danger without quailing.

When that aristocratic hoodlum Clodius (see page I-261) set about harassing Cicero and attacking his retinue with his gang of toughs, Cicero was not the man to face him out. Cicero fled the country and satisfied himself with writing rather whining letters of complaint. When Clodius was finally killed by a rival gang leader, Milo, in 52 b.c., Cicero undertook to defend Milo but was scared into voicelessness by hostile crowds.

Again, in the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, Cicero made a rather miserable spectacle of himself as he tried to keep from being ground to death between the two, and feared to commit himself too far and too dangerously *in* either direction.

With this background, the conspirators would be justified in not

wishing to risk their mutual safety to Cicero's courage.

This, however, is not the view Shakespeare presents Brutus as holding. He has Brutus give as his reason:

> For he [Cicero] will never follow anything
> That other men begin.

—Act II, scene i, lines 151-52

Brutus objects to Cicero's vanity and to his penchant for insisting on leading an operation or refusing to join. It is indeed true that Cicero was terribly vain, but not more so than Brutus is portrayed to be in this play.

Indeed, one can easily suspect that Brutus does not want Cicero because he does not want a rival; that it is Brutus himself whose vanity will never allow him to "follow anything that other men begin."

He has just joined the conspiracy which other men have begun, to be sure, but he is already calmly taking over the decision-making power and dictating the direction of the conspiracy. Cassius proposes Cicero and Brutus vetoes it. This, in fact, continues throughout the play. Cassius is constantly making solid, practical suggestions, which Brutus as constantly vetoes.

> … sacrifices, but not butchers…

Almost at once Brutus forces a wrong decision on the conspirators, one that makes rum inevitable.

Cassius suggests that Mark Antony be killed along with Caesar. This is a sensible view if we accept the notion of the assassination in the first place. In planning any attack, it is only practical to take into account the inevitable counterattack and take measures to blunt it. Even if Caesar is killed, Mark Antony, an experienced general who is popular with his troops, would have the ability and the will to strike back, if he is allowed to live. Why not kill him then to begin with?

But Brutus says:

> Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
> To cut the head off and then hack the limbs,
> Like wrath in death and envy afterwards;
> For Antony is but a limb of Caesar.
> Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.

—Act II, scene i, lines 162-66

Is this Brutus' nobility? If so, Shakespeare takes considerable pains to neutralize it in the assassination scene an act later, where the conspirators do act like butchers and Brutus urges them to it.

Is it Brutus' obtuse stupidity? Perhaps, but even more so it is an example of how he, not Cicero, "will never follow anything that other men begin."

Perhaps Brutus might himself have suggested taking care of Mark Antony along with Caesar, if only Cassius hadn't mentioned it first. Now, however, that Brutus is in the conspiracy he will lead it, and the one way to do that is to contradict any initiative on the part of the others.

Cassius, uneasily appalled by Brutus' blindness, tries to argue against it. Cassius says of Mark Antony:

> Yet I fear him;
> For in the ingrafted love he bears to Caesar…

—Act II, scene i, lines 183-84

But Brutus won't even let him finish. Brutus has spoken, and that's that

> … Count the clock

At this point there is the sound of a clock striking, and Brutus says:

> Peace! Count the clock.

—Act II, scene i, line 192

This is one of the more amusing anachronisms in Shakespeare, for there were no mechanical clocks in the modern sense in Caesar's time. The best that could be done was a water clock and they were not common, and did not strike. Striking clocks, run by falling weights, were inventions of medieval times.

Indeed, the very same scene, at the beginning, shows Brutus

speaking of time telling in a way far more appropriate to his period. He says then, peevishly, as he sleeplessly paces his bedroom:

> I cannot, by the progress of the stars,
> Give guess how near to day.

—Act II, scene i, lines 2-3

> … Cato's daughter

Some last arrangements are made. Decius volunteers to make certain that Caesar doesn't change his mind and that he does come to the Capitol.

There is talk of adding new conspirators and of the exact time of meeting. The conspirators then leave and Brutus is left alone.

But not for long. His wife enters, and demands to know what is going on. Who are these men who came? Why is Brutus acting so strangely? She feels she has a right to know, for

> I grant I am a woman; but withal
> A woman that Lord Brutus took to wife.
> I grant I am a woman; but withal
> A woman well reputed, Cato's daughter.

—Act II, scene i, lines 292-95

Cato was the Pompeian leader referred to earlier, who led the anti-Caesar forces in Africa. His full name was Marcus Porcius Cato, and he is usually called "Cato the Younger," because his great-grandfather, another Marcus Porcius Cato (see page I-227), was also important in Roman history. Cato the Younger was a model of rigid virtue. He deliberately conducted his life along the lines of the stories that were told of the ancient Romans.

Since he was always very ostentatious about his virtue, he annoyed other people; since he never made allowances for the human weaknesses of others, he angered them; and since he never compromised, he always went down to defeat in the end.

Later generations, however, who didn't have to deal with him themselves, have greatly admired his stiff honesty and his unbending

devotion to his principles.

Cato, after the defeat of the anti-Caesarian forces in Africa at the Battle of Thapsus in 46 b.c., was penned up with the remnants of the army in the city of Utica (near modern Tunis). Rather than surrender, he killed himself, so that he is sometimes known to later historians as "Cato of Utica." (Meanwhile the "noble" Brutus, far from emulating his uncle's steadfastness, had switched to Caesar's side and was serving under him.)

Cato had a daughter, Porcia, or "Portia" as the name appears in this play, who was thus Brutus' first cousin. The two had married in 46 b.c. and were thus married about two years at the time of the conspiracy. It was the second marriage for each.

> … a voluntary wound

Portia is an example of the idealized view of the Roman matron-almost repulsive in their high-minded patriotism, as in the case of Volumnia (see page I-225). Thus, Shakespeare follows an unpleasant story told by Plutarch and has Portia say:

> / have made strong proof of my constancy,
> Giving myself a voluntary wound
> Here in the thigh; can I bear that with patience,
> And not my husband's secrets?

—Act II, scene i, lines 299-302

According to Plutarch, she slashed her thigh with a razor, and then suffered a fever, presumably because the wound grew infected. She recovered and, showing Brutus the scar, said this indicated how well she could endure pain and ensured that even torture would wring no secrets out of her.

Roman legend spoke frequently of the manner in which Romans could endure pain in a patriotic cause. There is the tale, for instance, of Gaius Mucius, who in the very early days of the Roman Republic was captured by the general of the army laying siege to Rome. Mucius had invaded the general's tent with the intention of assassinating him and now the general demanded, under threat of torture, information on Rome's internal condition.

Mucius then deliberately placed his right hand in a nearby lamp flame and held it there till it was consumed, to indicate how little effect torture would have on him. Perhaps Portia's self-inflicted wound

was inspired by the Mucius legend. And perhaps the tale concerning Portia is no more true than that concerning Mucius.

If the matter of Portia's wound were true, then the fact that Brutus was unaware of a bad wound in his wife's thigh until she showed it to him gives us a surprising view of the nature of their marriage.

Caius Ligarius …

Before Brutus can explain the situation to Portia, however, a new conspirator enters and she must leave. Brutus greets him:

Caius Ligarius, that Metellus spake of.

—Act II, scene i, line 311

Plutarch calls him Caius Ligarius, but he is named Quintus Ligarius in other places. In either case, he is a senator who supported Pompey and held out for him with Cato the Younger. He was taken prisoner after the Battle of Thapsus, but was pardoned by Caesar after he had been brought to trial, with Cicero as his defender.

Ligarius would have joined the conspiracy sooner but he is sick. As soon as he hears of the details, however, he says:

By all the gods that Romans bow before,
1 here discard my sickness!

—Act II, scene i, lines 320-21

This story too is from Plutarch, and it is another example of the kind of heroism Romans loved to find in their historical accounts.

The heavens themselves…

That same night on which Casca has seen supernatural prodigies and Brutus has joined the conspiracy, Caesar himself has had a restless sleep. His wife, Calphurnia, has had nightmares. What's more, she has heard of the sights men have seen and she doesn't want Caesar to leave the house the next day, fearing that all these omens foretell evil to him.

Caesar refuses to believe it, maintaining the omens are to the world generally and not to himself in particular. To which Calphurnia

replies:

> When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
> The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 30-31

The comets, appearing in the skies at irregular intervals, and, with then-tails, taking on a most unusual shape, were wildly held to presage unusual disasters. For anything else, their appearance is too infrequent. Similarly, the unusual portents of the night must apply to some unusual person.

This makes sense provided astrology in general does.

Caesar does not go so far as to scorn astrology, but he does scorn fear in a pair of famous lines:

> Cowards die many times before their deaths;
> The valiant never taste of death but once.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 32-33

> Their minds may change

Nevertheless, Calphurnia continues to beg and eventually Caesar is sufficiently swayed to grant her her wish and to agree to send Mark Antony in his place.

It is morning by now, however, and Decius comes to escort Caesar to the Capitol. The news that Caesar has changed his mind and will not come staggers him. Quickly, he reinterprets all the omens and hints the senators will laugh. Not only does he make use of the threat of ridicule, but he also says:

> … the Senate have concluded
> To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar.
> If you shall send them word you will not come,
> Their minds may change.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 93-96

This seems true enough. Caesar is trying to pull off a coup that runs counter to the deepest Roman prejudices and it was bound to be a near thing. He had failed, at the Lupercalian festival, to gain a crown by popular acclamation. If he now missed a chance to force the Senate to give him one, he would be giving his opponents a chance to mobilize their forces and the whole project might be ruined. The historic Caesar won many successes by striking when the iron was hot and it isn't likely that he would let such a crucial moment pass.

Caesar changes his mind once again and makes the fateful decision to go.

> … Read it, great Caesar

Caesar's progress toward the Capitol is attended by further warnings, according to Plutarch's story, which Shakespeare follows. The soothsayer is there and Caesar tells him ironically that the ides of March are come (presumably implying that all is well). To which the soothsayer answers, portentously:

> Ay, Caesar, but not gone.

—Act III, scene i, line 2

Another man, Artemidorus, attempts to give Caesar a warning. According to Plutarch, he was a Greek professor of rhetoric from whom a number of the conspirators had been taking lessons. (In those days, rhetoric, the art of oratory, was indispensable to a public career.) He had picked up knowledge of their plans, presumably because they spoke carelessly before him, and he was anxious to reveal those plans to Caesar (perhaps out of pro-Caesarian conviction or perhaps out of the hope of profiting by Caesar's gratitude).

In any case, he passes a note of warning to Caesar, telling him of the plot. According to Plutarch, Caesar tried several times to read the note but was prevented from doing so by the press of people about him. Shakespeare makes it more dramatic, showing Caesar, by his arrogance, bringing his fate upon himself.

Artemidorus, in an agony of Impatience, cries out, as other petitions are handed Caesar:

> O Caesar, read mine first; for mine's a suit
> That touches Caesar nearer. Read it, great Caesar.

—Act III, scene i, lines 6-7

But Caesar answers grandly:

> What touches us ourself should be last served.

—Act III, scene i, line 8

And thus he condemns himself.

> Et tu, Brute…

In what follows, Shakespeare follows Plutarch very closely. The conspirators crowd around Caesar on the pretext that they are petitioning for the recall of the banished Publius Cimber, the brother of Metellus Cimber. Caesar refuses, in a fine oratorical display of unyieldingness, saying:

> … I am constant as the Northern Star
> Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the firmament.

—Act III, scene i, lines 60-62

The Northern Star (Polaris) does not itself move. Rather, all the other stars circle about it as a hub (in reflection, actually, of the earth's rotation about its axis, the northern end of which points nearly at Polaris). Caesar's picture of himself as the unchanging Northern Star about which all other men revolve is an example of what the Greeks called *hubris* ("overweening arrogance") and it is followed quickly by what the Greeks called *ate* ("retribution"). It is the biblical "Pride goeth before… a fall."

The conspirators have now surrounded him so that the onlookers cannot see what is happening, as each approaches on pretense of adding his own pleas to the petition. When Brutus makes his plea, Caesar is embarrassed. The Dictator has repulsed Metellus Cimber haughtily but he cannot use similar language to the beloved Brutus. All he can say is an uneasy:

What, Brutus?

—Act III, scene i, line 54

Then, later, when Decius begins his plea, Caesar points out that he cannot do it even for Brutus, saying:

Doth not Brutus bootless kneel?

—Act III, scene i, line 75

At which point Casca strikes with his dagger, crying:

Speak hands for me!

—Act III, scene i, line 76

According to Plutarch, they each proceed to strike at Caesar, having made an agreement among themselves that each conspirator must be equally involved in the assassination. No one of them must be able to try to escape at the expense of the others by pleading he did not actually stab Caesar.

Caesar tried vainly to avoid the blows until it was Brutus' turn. Brutus, according to Plutarch, struck him "in the privities." That was the last straw for Caesar. When Brutus lifted his weapon to strike, Caesar cried out, "Thou also, Brutus!" and attempted no further to avoid the strokes. His outcry, in Latin, was so famous that Shakespeare made no attempt to translate it, but kept it as it was, a small patch of Latin in the midst of the play:

Et tu, Brute? Then fall Caesar.

—Act III, scene i, line 77

… in Caesar's blood

So died Julius Caesar, on March 15, 44 b.c., hacked to death by twenty-three stabs. Brutus had earlier made an apparently noble speech to the effect that they not "hack the limbs" and that they "be sacrificers, but not butchers" (see page I-279). He had meant it figuratively with reference to the possible death of Mark Antony, but

now that speech takes on a grislier aspect, when it turns out that Caesar has, deliberately, been hacked and butchered to death.

Was Shakespeare sardonically contrasting Brutus' brutal acts with his "noble" words? What should we think? Perhaps Brutus merely went along with the general feeling of the conspirators that the assassination be carried out by universal hacking. This seems doubtful since in every other case in the play he insists on having his own way even though the consensus is against him. Then too, Shakespeare has Brutus go on to say:

> Stoop, Romans, stoop,
> And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood
> Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords.
> Then walk we forth, even to the market place,
> And waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
> Let's all cry "Peace, freedom, and liberty!"

—Act III, scene i, lines 105-10

Plutarch merely says the swords were bloodied, but Shakespeare has Brutus suggest that they deliberately bloody their arms. Does this not give them all the precise appearance of butchers? Does this not deliberately belie Brutus' plea to "be sacrificers, but not butchers"?

It is precisely as butchers that Brutus would have them all go out to the market place; that is, the forum. The Latin word *forum* means "market place." It was located in the valley between the Capitoline and Palatine hills, the first two hills to be occupied by the city. The market place is a natural site for people to gather, trade news, and discuss business, so that the word "forum" has now come to mean any public place for the discussion of ideas.

> … on Pompey's basis…

When Cassius foretells grimly that this scene will be re-enacted in tragedies through future centuries, the "noble" Brutus evinces no sorrow. Rather, he lends himself to this lugubrious fantasy and says:

> How many times shall
> Caesar bleed in sport,
> That now on Pompey's basis lies along
> No worthier than the dust!

—Act III, scene i, lines 114-16

The reference to "Pompey's basis" is to the pedestal of the statue of Pompey that stood at the Capitol. The statues and trophies of Pompey which had come to grace the Capitol in the time of Pompey's greatness had been taken away in the aftermath of Caesar's victory at Pharsalia by those in Rome who thought to ingratiate themselves with the victor in this way. Caesar, on his return, ordered them replaced, forgiving the memory of Pompey even as he had forgiven so many of Pompey's followers.

And yet not only was he assassinated by those he had forgiven, but in death he was dragged by them (probably deliberately) to the base of Pompey's statue in order that he might lie there a symbolic victim at the feet of the man he had defeated.

… no harm intended…

At the realization that Caesar was dead, the Capitol emptied itself of the panicked spectators. Who knew, after all, how broad and general the plot was and how many were marked for death?

It was necessary, therefore, for the conspirators to calm the city at once lest a panicked populace, once it regained its breath, break out in uncontrollable rioting of which no one could foresee the end. One senator, Publius, too old and infirm to fly with the rest, remains on the scene terrified. He is accosted gently and sent with a message. Brutus says:

Publius, good cheer;
There is no harm intended to your person,
Nor to Roman else. So tell them, Publius.

—Act III, scene i, lines 89-91

… to lie in death

Mark Antony is a special case. He knew that if the plot extended to even one person beyond Caesar himself, he would be the one. So far he had been spared; he had even been taken aside at the time of the assassination. It was necessary now for him to play for time and gain, temporarily, the friendship of the conspirators, or at least allay their

suspicions.

In Shakespeare's version, Mark Antony sends a messenger to Brutus with a most humble message:

> // Brutus will vouchsafe that Antony
> May safely come to him and be resolved
> How Caesar hath deserved to lie in death,
> Mark Antony shall not love Caesar dead
> So well as Brutus living; but will follow
> The fortunes and affairs of noble Brutus
> Through the hazards of this untrod state
> With all true faith.

—Act III, scene i, lines 130-37

It is a careful speech, appealing to Brutus' vanity and giving him the necessary adjective "noble." Mark Antony tempts Brutus with the picture of himself taking the place of Caesar, while Mark Antony continues as loyal assistant. It would seem that Antony judges Brutus to be not so much interested in stopping Caesar as in replacing him, and perhaps he is right.

Nor is Mark Antony a complete hypocrite. The message does not promise unqualified submission to Brutus. It sets a condition. Brutus must arrange to have Mark Antony "be resolved" as to the justice of the assassination; that is, to have it explained to his satisfaction.

Of course, Mark Antony has no intention of allowing the assassination to be explained to his satisfaction, but Brutus cannot see that. The unimaginably vain Brutus feels the assassination to be necessary; how then can anyone else doubt that necessity once Brutus explains it?

> Your voice shall be as strong…

Brutus is won over at once, as he always is by praise, but Cassius is not. He says:

> But yet have I a mind
> That fears him much…

—Act III, scene i, lines 144-45

Brutus, with his usual misjudgment, brushes that aside and welcomes Mark Antony, who now comes onstage with a most magnificent piece of bluffing. He speaks in love and praise of Caesar, and grandly suggests that if they mean to kill *him,* now is the time to do it, in the same spot and with the same weapons that killed Caesar. Yet he is careful to join the offer with flattery:

> No place will please me so, no mean of death,
> As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,
> The choice and master spirits of this age.

—Act III, scene i, lines 161-63

The flattery further melts the susceptible Brutus, of course, and he offers conciliatory words to Mark Antony. The practical Cassius realizes that Brutus is all wrong and feels the best move now is to inveigle Mark Antony into sharing the guilt by offering to cut him in on the loot. He says:

> Your voice shall be as strong as any man's
> In the disposing of new dignities.

—Act III, scene i, lines 177-78

> … what compact…

Mark Antony makes no direct reply to the offer of loot, but proceeds to strike those attitudes of nobility he knows will impress Brutus. He ostentatiously shakes the bloody hands of the conspirators yet speaks eloquently of his love for Caesar, once Brutus professes that he himself had loved Caesar.

Cassius, rather desperately, breaks into the flow of rhetoric with a practical question to Mark Antony:

> But what compact mean you to have with us?
> Will you be pricked in number of our friends,
> Or shall we on, and not depend on you?

—Act III, scene i, lines 215-17

Where we write names with chalk on slate, or with pen and pencil on paper, the Romans were apt to scratch them in the wax coated on a wooden tablet. Where we check off names with a /, they would prick a little hole next to the name. Hence the question "Will you be pricked in number of our friends…"

… do not consent …

Again, Mark Antony evades a direct commitment. He still wants an explanation of Caesar's crimes, which Brutus is still confident he can give. What's more, Antony adds a casual request:

… that / may
Produce his [Caesar's] body to the market place,
And in the pulpit, as becomes a friend,
Speak in the order of his funeral.

—Act III, scene i, lines 227-30

It seems a moderate request. After all, Caesar, though assassinated, deserves an honorable funeral and a eulogy by a good friend; especially a friend who seems to have joined the conspiracy. Brutus agrees at once.

The clear-seeing Cassius is horrified. He pulls Brutus aside and whispers urgently:

You know not what you do; do not consent
That Antony speak in his funeral.

—Act III, scene i, lines 232-33

Cassius knows, after all, that Mark Antony is a skillful orator and that if he catches the attention of the populace he can become dangerous.

Nothing, however, can win out over Brutus' vanity. It is the mainspring of all the action. Brutus points out that he will speak first and explain the assassination (he is always sure that he has but to explain the deed and everyone will understand and be satisfied) and

that Mark Antony can, after that, do nothing. To make doubly sure, Brutus sets conditions, saying to Antony:

> You shall not in your funeral speech blame us,
> But speak all good you can devise of Caesar
> And say you do't by our permission;

—Act III, scene i, lines 245-48

Brutus was worse than vain; he was a fool to think that such conditions could for one moment stop an accomplished orator and force him to make the conspirators seem noble and magnanimous. Later on, when Mark Antony does speak, he keeps to those conditions rigorously, and it does the conspirators no good at all.

… Caesar's spirit…

Mark Antony is left alone with Caesar's body and, in an emotional soliloquy, apologizes to the corpse for his show of affection with the conspirators. He predicts the coming of civil war and says:

> And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
> Cry "Havoc," and let slip the dogs of war,

—Act III, scene i, lines 270-73

Ate is visualized here as the personified goddess of retribution, and "Havoc" is the fearful cry that sounds out at the final fall of a besieged city. It is the signal for unrestrained killing and looting when all real fighting is done. (The word "hawk" is from the same root and one can see in the swoop of the hawk the symbol of the surge of a conquering army on its helpless victims.)

The reference to "Caesar's spirit" may be taken literally in any society that believes in ghosts, and these include both Mark Antony's and Shakespeare's. Indeed, Caesar's spirit makes an actual appearance in Plutarch's tale and therefore in this play as well.

… Octavius Caesar…

It is but a small leap, however, to interpret "Caesar's spirit" in another way too. His spirit may be the spirit of his reforms and his attempt to reorganize the Roman government under a strong and centralized rule. This could live on and come "ranging for revenge." And that spirit might well be embodied in another man.

As though to indicate this, Antony's soliloquy is followed by the immediate entrance of a "Servant"; a messenger coming to announce his master is on his way. It follows only six lines after the reference to "Caesar's spirit" and Mark Antony recognizes the newcomer, saying:

> You serve Octavius Caesar, do you not?
>
> —Act III, scene i, line 276

Octavius Caesar, whose proper name is Caius Octavius, is the only living close relative of Julius Caesar. He is the grandson of Caesar's sister, Julia, and is therefore the grandnephew of Julius. He was born in 63 b.c. and was nineteen years old at the time of the assassination.

Octavius was a sickly youth. He had joined Caesar in Spain (just before the opening of the play) but he was obviously unsuited for war. Nor was his greatuncle anxious to push him into warfare. In default of living children of his own, the Dictator needed Octavius as an heir. Therefore, when Caesar was making ready to move east against Parthia, he ordered the boy to remain in Greece at his studies.

Octavius was still in Greece when news of the assassination reached him, and at once he decided to make for Rome, there to demand what he could of his great uncle's inheritance.

Antony does not welcome the news of the coming of Octavius. He may have loved Julius Caesar, but that does not require him to love Caesar's grandnephew. After all, Antony could reasonably argue that he, as Caesar's loyal lieutenant and a mature man of war, is more realistically Caesar's heir than some sickly child who happens to be related to Caesar by accident of birth. The presence of the boy would merely produce complications and Antony does his best to keep him away. He sends back a message:

> Here is a mourning Rome, a dangerous Rome,
> No Rome of safety for Octavius yet.

—Act III, scene i, lines 288-89

… I loved Rome more

The next scene moves directly to Caesar's funeral. Actually, it took place on March 20 and the five days between assassination and funeral were busy ones. The conspirators had hurriedly taken hold of the spoils. Many of them have had provinces assigned to them: Brutus will govern Macedonia; Cassius will take over Syria; Decius will have Cisalpine Gaul; Trebonius, part of Asia Minor; Metellus Cimber, another part of Asia Minor; and so on.

For men supposedly actuated only by a noble concern for the commonwealth, they were extraordinarily quick to place themselves in positions of power. Nor was Brutus behindhand in taking his share.

But Shakespeare ignores this and proceeds directly to the funeral.

Brutus begins by addressing a hostile crowd in the forum, offering to explain the circumstances of the assassination. He does so in prose; stilted prose, at that, with laboriously balanced sentences. He insists he loved Caesar and killed him only for the greater good of Rome:

Not that I loved Caesar less,
but that I loved Rome more.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 21-22

The essence of his defense is that Caesar had grown too ambitious for Rome's safety; that is, Caesar was ambitious to be king. Brutus says (and here he is almost convincing):

As Caesar loved me,
I weep for him; as he was fortunate,
I rejoice at it; as he was valiant,
1 honor him; but as he was ambitious,
I slew him.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 24-27

Brutus then prepares to keep his promise of letting Mark Antony speak on behalf of Caesar. With fatuous vanity, he urges the crowd to listen to Antony and himself hurries away as though he is convinced

that he has so turned the crowd against Caesar and toward himself that nothing Mark Antony can say will undo matters.

> … Brutus is an honorable man

Now Mark Antony is there with Caesar's corpse. Quietly, he begins one of the most famous passages Shakespeare has ever written. (Whatever Antony said in reality-and it must have been effective, for he gained Rome thereby-it is hard to believe that he could possibly have scaled the heights Shakespeare wrote for him.) He begins:

> Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
> I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 75-76

He admits that if *(if)* Caesar were ambitious, that was a bad fault and he has certainly been punished for it. As he promised Brutus, he explains that he speaks by permission of the conspirators and he does nothing but praise them:

> Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest
> (For Brutus is an honorable man,
> So are they all, all honorable men),
> Come 1 to speak in Caesar's funeral.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 83-86

The phrase "Brutus is an honorable man" is to be repeated and repeated by Mark Antony. He gives the praise to Brutus in precisely the fashion Brutus most enjoys, crying out how honorable and noble he is. Yet the skillful repetition, in rising tones of irony, builds the anger of the crowd to the point where the very epithet "honorable" becomes an insult.

Speaking in short and moving phrases, as though he were choked with emotion, Mark Antony disposes of the charge of ambition:

> He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
> But Brutus says he was ambitious.
> And Brutus is an honorable man.

He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill;
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And sure he is an honorable man.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 87-101

Antony's arguments are, of course, irrelevant. By "ambition," Brutus meant Caesar's desire to be king, and nothing Antony says disproves that desire. Caesar might be a good personal friend, yet plan to be a king. He might donate ransom money to the public treasury and express pity for the poor, but intend these acts only to build up the good will with which to buy the crown. If he did refuse the crown, it was only to force the mob to insist he take it, and he regretted the failure of the scheme.

But all that, of course, doesn't matter. Antony's speech is almost hypnotic in its force, and, properly presented, it can win over a modern audience which had earlier been prepared to sympathize with Brutus.

… 'tis his will

The crowd is indeed moved and Mark Antony senses that without difficulty. It is time for the next step, to appeal directly and forcefully to the powerful emotion of greed. He says:

But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar;
I found it in his closet; 'tis his will.
Let but the commons hear this testament,
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,
And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds,

—Act III, scene ii, lines 130-34

Yes indeed, Antony has not been idle in the interval between assassination and funeral either. The very night following the assassination, having made a temporary peace with the conspirators, he took a crucial action. He seized the funds which Caesar had gathered for his projected Parthian campaign and persuaded Calphurnia to let him have access to all of Caesar's papers, among which he found the will.

The funds would be important when it came to bribing senators and hiring soldiers. The will-well, that would be used now.

Naturally, once Antony mentions the will and declines to read it, the crowd howls for it to be read. Antony hangs back and the more he does so, the more violently insistent the crowd becomes. Choosing his moment with artistic care, Antony advances his reason for hesitating:

> / fear I wrong the honorable men
> Whose daggers have stabbed Caesar; I do fear it.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 153-54

And one man in the crowd calls out with passion:

> They were traitors. Honorable men!

—Act III, scene ii, line 155

There is hatred in the repetition of that phrase so often applied to Brutus, and which Brutus so loves. Another man in the crowd cries out.

> They were villains, murderers!
> The will! Read the will!

—Act III, scene ii, lines 157-58

> … the Nervii

Mark Antony has them now, but it is still not enough. He intends

to make them virtually insane with rage. He descends from the rostrum and has them gather round Caesar's corpse. Antony holds up the cloak Caesar was wearing when he was killed:

> You all do know this mantle; I remember
> The first time ever Caesar put it on:
> 'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,
> That day he overcame the Nervii.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 172-75

The Nervii were a fierce Gallic tribe living in what is now Belgium, and Caesar had beaten them in 57 b.c. This was a skillful allusion, too, for it reminded the crowd of Caesar's conquests, not over Romans, but over barbarian Gauls (whom Romans particularly hated because of the memory of the ancient Gallic sack of Rome in 390 b.c.).

To be sure, this passage doesn't square with actual history. Mark Antony couldn't possibly remember the evening of the day on which Caesar overcame the Nervii, since he didn't join Caesar in Gaul till three years later. Moreover, is it likely that Caesar on the supreme day on which he expects to be crowned king will put on a thirteen-year-old cloak? All our information concerning him agrees that he was a dandy, and meticulous with his grooming.

However, it is an effective passage and the real Mark Antony would have used it, regardless of accuracy, if he had thought of it

> … the most unkindest cut of all

Now Mark Antony begins to point to the bloodied rents in the mantle where swords had sliced through (and this he actually did, according to Plutarch). What's more, he has progressed to the point where he can begin to stab the conspirators with pointed words.

> Look, in this place ran Cassius" dagger through;
> See what a rent the envious Casca made;
> Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed,

—Act III, scene ii, lines 176-78

Antony lingers on Brutus' stroke, for it was this man who had

instructed him to praise the conspirators, and it is Brutus therefore whom he chiefly wants to destroy with praise. He says:

> … Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel. Judge,
> O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
> This was the most unkindest cut of all;

—Act III, scene ii, lines 183-85

Now he whips away the cloak to reveal Caesar's own gashed body, and that is the equivalent of crying "Havoc," for the maddened crowd breaks out with:

> Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire!
> Kill! Slay! Let not a traitor live!

—Act III, scene ii, lines 206-7

> … When comes such another

But still Mark Antony is not through. He calms them yet again, still keeping to his promise to praise Brutus, by saying:

> / am no orator, as Brutus is;
> But (as you know me all) a plain blunt man

—Act HI, scene ii, lines 219-20

It is a piece of praise that openly laughs at Brutus, and there is still, after all, the will to read. Antony begins the reading and says:

> To every Roman citizen he gives,
> To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 243-44

There is more:

> Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
> His private arbors, and new-planted orchards,
> On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,

And to your heirs forever; common pleasures,
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 249-53

That brings Antony to his climax. He has wrought on the crowd with pity, with greed, and with gratitude, and they are in the highest state combustible. He gives them one last shout:

Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?

—Act III, scene ii, line 254

With that, the crowd explodes. They are utterly mad and ready to destroy the conspirators and Rome with them if necessary. Mark Antony watches them rush off, raving, and says grimly:

Now let it work; Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take though what course thou wilt.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 263-64

… his name's Cinna

Shakespeare shows the mob at its frightening work in one incident taken from Plutarch, which involves a minor poet named Helvius Cinna. He was a friend of Caesar's and no relative of Lucius Cornelius Cinna, the conspirator.

Cinna the poet is stopped by elements of the mob who demand he identify himself. He says:

Truly, my name is Cinna.

—Act III, scene iii, line 27

The crowd at once sets up its howl and though the poor fellow shrieks that he is not Cinna the conspirator but merely China the poet, they will not listen, crying:

It is no matter, his name's Cinna;

—Act III, scene iii, line 33

… rid like madmen…

Soon enough, the conspirators realize the two deadly mistakes Brutus has made for them; letting Antony live, and letting him speak. The mere name of "conspirator" is now enough to kill.

The servant who had appeared in the earlier scene to talk of Octavius appears soon after the conclusion of Antony's great speech to announce:

… Brutus and Cassius
Are rid like madmen through the gates of Rome.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 271-72

They hoped at first merely to retire to some nearby town till Rome had cooled down, and then to return. This was not to happen, however. Rome did not cool down; Mark Antony remained in control. The conspirators scattered, some to the respective provinces they had been assigned, some elsewhere. Brutus and Cassius are the only conspirators with whom the play concerns itself in the last two acts. They retire to the eastern provinces.

… Octavius is already come …

But Mark Antony was not to have it all his own way. He had no way of knowing it, but the day of his funeral speech was the climax of his life, the apex of his power. He had ended it with the rhetorical cry: "Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?" and eleven lines later that question is answered.

The servant who brings the news of the flight of Brutus and Cassius also announces news concerning his master:

Sir, Octavius is already come to Rome.

—Act III, scene ii, line 265

Here was another Caesar. He was that literally, for he adopted the name; and he was that figuratively too, for he was even more capable than Julius, winning that for which the older man had died without getting.

There was no way of telling this when Octavius first came; young, sickly, and seeming to be of little account in comparison to the great, magnetic charisma that now clung to Mark Antony. Antony underestimated him (everyone did) and could not tell that, as he himself had been Brutus' nemesis, so Octavius was fated to be his-something that will be made clear enough in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.*

But even without foreseeing the future, Antony can see that Octavius' coming is a serious embarrassment. Caesar's will, which Antony had read with such consummate skill at the funeral, contained clauses he tried to suppress. Caesar, in his will, had named Octavius as his heir and, what's more, had adopted him as his son. This meant that Octavius owned all of Caesar's funds (which Mark Antony had appropriated) and would have become the next king if Caesar had lived long enough to gain the monarchy.

Mark Antony wanted the will ratified and had persuaded the Senate to do so by agreeing to allow them also to declare an amnesty for the conspirators. However, Antony fought against the ratification by the Senate of that part of the will that dealt with Octavius. Just the same, Gaius Octavius changed his name to Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, to indicate his new status as Caesar's adopted son, and is thereafter known to English-speaking historians as Octavian. In this play, however, he remains "Octavius" throughout and I will call him so.

The change in name was a shrewd move. It enabled him to call himself "Caesar" and capitalize on the magic of that name. What's more, Cicero rallied to him, out of hatred for Mark Antony, and Cicero's oratory was a tower of strength.

> He and Lepidus…

There was also the question of the army. In the play, when Mark Antony hears Octavius is in Rome, he asks his whereabouts and is told:

> He and Lepidus are at Caesar's house.

—Act III, scene ii, line 267

The reference is to a Roman general, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. On the day of the assassination, he just happened to have a legion of troops on the outskirts of the city. He was preparing to move with them to his province in southern Gaul, but when the news of the assassination came, he occupied Rome instead. If he had been a strong character, this accident of being on the scene at the crucial moment might have made him master of the Roman realm.

Lepidus was, however, a weakling. He lacked Octavius' name, Antony's reputation, and the resolution of both. In later years he remained a pawn.

… to Octavius

Antony, hearing that Octavius is in Rome and with Lepidus, doesn't hesitate. He says to the Servant:

Bring me to Octavius.

—Act III, scene ii, line 274

The short mob scene involving China the poet intervenes and the fourth act then opens with Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus in triple conference. As far as the play is concerned, little time has elapsed.

In actual history, however, more than a year and a half of intensive political and military jockeying has intervened between the funeral of Caesar and the three-way meeting of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus.

After the funeral, Antony found himself in annoying difficulties. He was not the politician Caesar had been and he found Octavius a curiously capable enemy for the sickly youngster he seemed to be. What's more, Cicero now rose to new prominence and his oratory flamed to new heights. Cicero's hatred for Mark Antony showed itself in a succession of unbelievably vituperative speeches that wrecked Antony's popularity almost as much as Antony's funeral speech had wrecked Brutus'.

Antony felt he could best regain lost ground by military victory. Decius (Decimus Brutus) was in control of Cisalpine Gaul and he was the closest of the conspirators. Antony turned against him, despite the senatorial amnesty of the conspirators, and thus began a new civil war.

As soon as Antony had marched out of Rome at the head of his troops, however, Octavius persuaded the Senate to declare him a

public enemy. With senatorial backing gone, Mark Antony could not make head against Decius, but was forced, in April 43 b.c. (a full year after the assassination), to march his army into Gaul. He had failed militarily as well as politically.

Octavius, master of Rome, now forced the Senate to recognize him at last as heir to Caesar. In September 43 b.c. he himself led an army against Decius. Octavius was no fighter, but the name of Caesar succeeded where Antony had failed. Decius' soldiers deserted in droves, and Decius himself had to flee. He was captured and executed and Octavius' reputation skyrocketed.

By that time, though, Brutus and Cassius had consolidated their power over the eastern half of the Roman realm. It was clear that if Antony and Octavius continued to maneuver against each other, they would both lose and the conspirators would yet emerge in control.

Lepidus therefore labored to bring Antony and Octavius together in a compromise settlement, and succeeded. All three met in Bononia (the modern Bologna) on November 27, 43 b.c., twenty months after the assassination.

The three agreed to combine in a three-man government, an agreement resembling the one that had been made by Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus seventeen years before. In fact, the new agreement is called the Second Triumvirate. The fourth act opens after the Second Triumvirate has been formed.

> … with a spot…

Shakespeare presents the Triumvirate at the moment they make a grisly bargain to seal their compact.

What they chiefly need, after all, is money. One way of obtaining it is to declare certain well-to-do Individuals guilty of treason, execute them, and confiscate their estates. This also gives each triumvir a chance to get rid of personal enemies as well. The enemy of one, however, might be the friend or relative of another member of the Triumvirate; and if one of them sacrifices a friend or relative he would naturally expect the other two to make a similar sacrifice.

The proscriptions (that is, arbitrary condemnations) include, for instance, Lepidus' brother. As quid pro quo, Antony must allow his nephew to be marked with a prick in the wax (see page I-290), indicating he is listed for execution. Antony says, with a kind of gruesome magnanimity:

> He shall not live; look, with a spot I damn him.

—Act IV, scene i, line 6

What Mark Antony demands (something that does not appear in the play at this point) and Octavius is forced to concede, is Cicero's life. Cicero had labored for Octavius and had made all the difference when the young man had first come to Rome as an almost ignored young man, and now Octavius, grown to power, delivers the great orator to his enemy. However much we might excuse it as practical politics, however much we might argue that Octavius had no choice, it remains the blackest single act of Octavius' long and illustrious career.

Are levying powers. ..

With the immediate financial problem ironed out by means of the proscriptions, the Triumvirate can turn to military matters. Antony says:

And now, Octavius,
Listen great things. Brutus and Cassius
Are levying powers; we must straight make head.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 40-42

The united Caesarians must face the united conspirators. Brutus had been in Macedonia for a year now and Cassius in Syria. In the face of the gathering of their enemies, they were getting armies ready for battle and planning to unite their forces.

… this night in Sardis…

At once the action moves to the conspirators, who are meeting each other in Asia Minor, and for the first tune the setting of the play is outside the city of Rome.

The scene is laid in the camp of Brutus' army outside Sardis, and one of Brutus' aides, Lucilius, tells him with reference to Cassius' approaching army:

They mean this night in Sardis to be quartered;

—Act IV, scene ii, line 28

Sardis is a city in western Asia Minor, forty-five miles east of the Aegean Sea. In ancient times it was the capital of the Lydian monarchy, which reached its height under Croesus, who reigned there from 560 to 546 b.c. The wealth of Sardis and the kingdom of Lydia at that time was such that the Greeks used to say "as rich as Croesus," a phrase that is still used today.

It was captured by the Persians in 546 b.c. Then when Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian Empire two centuries later, Sardis fell under the rule of Macedonian generals and monarchs.

In 133 b.c. it became Roman and continued to remain a great city for over a thousand years more. It was finally destroyed in 1402 by the hosts of Tamerlane, the Mongol conqueror, and has lain in ruins ever since.

… an itching palm

Once Brutus and Cassius meet in the former's tent, they have at each other, for both have accumulated grievances. Brutus scorns Cassius for his avarice:

> Let me tell you, Cassius, you yourself
> Are much condemned to have an itching palm,
> To sell and mart your offices for gold
> To undeservers.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 9-12

The difficulty with the conspirators, as much as with the Triumvirate, is money. Soldiers must be paid or they will desert, and the money must be obtained. Cassius therefore sold appointments to high positions for ready cash, and it is this Brutus scorns.

Another source of money was from the surrounding population. The helpless civilians had no way of resisting the armies, and during the early part of 42 b.c., for instance, Cassius stripped the island of Rhodes of all its precious metals. Asia Minor felt the squeeze too. Wherever Cassius' army passed, the natives were stripped bare and, in some cases, killed when they had given the last drachma. Brutus scorns this too, for he says:

… I can raise no money by vile means. By heaven,

I had rather coin my heart
And drop my blood for drachmas than to wring
From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash
By any indirection.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 71-75

This sounds good, but in the course of the Pompeian war, Brutus, as an actual historical character, had spent some time on the island of Cyprus. There he had oppressed the provincials heartlessly, squeezing money out of them without pity, and writing complaining letters that he was prevented from squeezing still more out of them by other officials.

Then too, while Cassius was draining Rhodes, Brutus demanded money of the city of Xanthus in Asia Minor, and when the city would not (or could not) pay, he destroyed it. He is supposed to have felt remorse after the destruction of Xanthus and to have ceased trying to collect money in this fashion.

And yet he lists one of his grievances against Cassius as:

I did send to you
For certain sums of gold, which you denied me;

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 69-70

It is immediately after that that he says unctuously that he "can raise no money by vile means." In other words, he cannot steal but he is willing to have Cassius steal, share in the proceeds, and then scorn Cassius as a robber. Neither Brutus' intelligence nor his honesty ever seem to survive the words Shakespeare carefully put into his mouth.

… swallowed fire

In the quarrel, it is Cassius who backs away, and the scene ends in a reconciliation. Characteristically, Brutus praises himself unstintingly as one who is slow to anger and quick to forgive. He says:

O Cassius, you are yoked with a lamb
That carries anger as the flint bears fire,
Who, much enforced, shows a hasty spark,

And straight is cold again.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 109-12

Brutus further explains his momentary anger by telling Cassius that his wife, Portia, is dead:

Impatient of my absence,
And grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony
Have made themselves so strong-for with her death
That tidings came-with this she fell distract
And (her attendants absent) swallowed fire.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 151-55

According to Plutarch, she choked herself by putting hot embers into her mouth. This seems so strange a way of committing suicide as to be almost unbelievable. Is it possible that this is a distortion of a much more likely death-that she allowed a charcoal fire to burn in a poorly ventilated room and died of carbon monoxide poisoning?

… farewell, Portia …

And now an odd thing happens. An officer, Marcus Valerius Messala, comes in with news from Rome. Brutus maneuvers nun (with considerable effort) into revealing the fact that Portia is dead. Without saying he already knows the fact, Brutus says calmly:

Why, farewell, Portia. We must die, Messala.
With meditating that she must die once,
I have the patience to endure it now.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 189-91

Brutus adhered to that school of philosophy called Stoicism. It had been founded, some three centuries earlier, by a Greek philosopher, Zeno of Citium (who possibly had Phoenician ancestry as well). He lectured at a *Stoa Poikile* (a "painted porch"; that is, a corridor lined with frescoes) in Athens. From this porch the

philosophy took its name.

Stoicism saw the necessity of avoiding pain, but did not feel that choosing pleasure was the best way to do so. The only safe way of living the good life, Stoics felt, was to put oneself beyond both pleasure and pain: to train oneself not to be the slave of either passion or fear, to treat both happiness and woe with indifference. If you desire nothing, you need fear the loss of nothing.

Brutus, with his "Why, farewell, Portia," was greeting the death of a loved one with the proper Stoic response.

But why didn't he tell Messala that he already knew of the death in detail and had just been discussing it with Cassius? One theory is that, having written the proper Stoic scene with its "farewell, Portia," Shakespeare felt it presented Brutus in an unsympathetic light. He felt, perhaps, that an English audience could scarcely feel the proper sympathy for so extreme a Roman attitude; they would feel it repellently heartless. He therefore wrote the earlier scene in which Brutus is still Stoical but shows enough feeling to grow angry with Cassius. Then, the theory goes on, both versions appeared, through carelessness, in the final printed copy of the play.

Yet it seems to me that this cannot be so. Shortly after Messala enters, Cassius, still brooding over the news, says to himself:

> Portia, art thou gone?
>
> —Act IV, scene iii, line 165a

To this Brutus makes a hasty response:

> No more, I pray you.
>
> —Act IV, scene iii, line 165b

It is as though he does more than merely neglect to tell Messala of his knowledge. He takes special pains to keep Cassius from telling him.

Why? Perhaps precisely so he can strike the proper Stoic note. Since he already knows and the shock is over, he can greet the news with marvelous calm, and strike a noble pose.

We might find an excuse for him and say that he was seizing the opportunity to be ostentatiously strong and Stoical in order to hearten his officers and his army with a good example. On the other hand, he

might have done it out of a vain desire for praise. After all, as soon as Brutus makes his Stoic response, Messala says, worshipingly:

Even so great men great losses should endure.

—Act IV, scene iii, line 192

If this is so, and certainly it is a reasonable supposition, what a monster of vanity Shakespeare makes out Brutus to be.

Cicero is dead

Before Messala has the news of Portia's death forced out of him, he delivers the news of the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate. Dozens of men of senatorial rank have been executed. What's more, says Messala:

Cicero is dead, And by that order of proscription.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 178-79

As soon as the Second Triumvirate was formed, Cicero, knowing that any accommodation between Octavius and Antony would have to be at his own expense, tried to escape from Italy. Contrary winds drove his ship back to shore, however, and before he could try again, the soldiers sent to kill him had arrived.

Those with him, his servants and retainers, made as though to resist, but Cicero, sixty-three years old and tired of the wild vicissitudes of public life, found at the end the physical courage he had so conspicuously lacked throughout his life. Forbidding resistance, he waited calmly for the soldiers and was cut down on December 7, 43 b.c., twenty-one months after Julius Caesar's assassination.

… toward Philippi

Brutus, meanwhile, has told of the news he himself has received; news to the effect that the triumvirs are on the move eastward, taking the offensive. He says:

Messala, I have here received letters

That young Octavius and Mark Antony
Come down upon us with a mighty power,
Bending their expedition toward Philippi.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 166-69

Philippi was an important city in the province of Macedonia, and was located about ten miles north of the Aegean Sea. It had been built up on the site of an earlier village in 356 b.c. by Philip II, King of Macedon and father of Alexander the Great The city was named for Philip.

… taken at the flood…

The question now is how best to react to the Triumvirate offensive. Cassius takes the cautious view. He suggests their forces remain on the defensive.

'Tis better that the enemy seek us;
So shall he waste his means, weary his soldiers,
Doing himself offense, whilst we, lying still,
Are full of rest, defense, and nimbleness.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 198-201

Brutus, however, disagrees. He points out that the provinces between the enemy army and themselves are angered by the looting they have undergone and would join Antony and Octavius. Their own army, on the other hand, is as large as it is ever likely to be, and if they wait it will start declining. He says, sententiously, in a famous passage:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 217-20

Once again, Brutus contradicts Cassius and has his way and the result proves his judgment to be wrong. Throughout the play, Brutus consistently misjudges the moment when the tide is at the flood, and to place this passage in his mouth seems to intend irony.

… this monstrous apparition

Brutus makes ready for sleep, in an almost family atmosphere of concern for his servants (and he is portrayed most nearly noble, in good truth, here). He settles down to read a book when suddenly he cries out:

Ha! Who comes here?
I think it is the weakness of mine eyes
That shapes this monstrous apparition.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 274-76

It is the ghost of Caesar, which Brutus boldly accosts. It tells him only that they will meet again at Philippi.

One might suppose that this was a Shakespearean invention, introduced for dramatic effect, for the chance of turning lights low, producing shadows, and chilling the audience, but, in actual fact, Shakespeare does not have to invent it. The report that Caesar's ghost appeared to Brutus is to be found in Plutarch.

It is with a forward look to this scene, perhaps, that Shakespeare had had Mark Antony speak earlier of "Caesar's spirit."

It proves not so. ..

The fifth act opens in the plains near Philippi, with the opposing armies facing each other and waiting for battle. Octavius, looking at the scene with grim satisfaction, says:

Now, Antony, our hopes are answered;
You said the enemy would not come down,
But keep the hills and upper regions.
It proves not so…

—Act V, scene i, lines 1-4

What had happened between the acts was this. Brutus and Cassius, crossing the straits into Macedonia from Asia Minor, encountered a portion of the triumvir army near Philippi. If the conspirators had attacked at once, they ought to have won, but before they could do so, the rest of the triumvir army arrived and it was a standoff.

The triumvir army now outnumbered the conspirators but was weaker in cavalry. What is more, it was Brutus and Cassius who had the strong position in the hills, while Antony and Octavius occupied a marshy and malarial plain.

Brutus and Cassius had only to stay where they were. It would have been suicidal for Antony and Octavius to try to charge into the hills. Yet to stay on the plains would expose them to hunger and disease.

Indeed, Octavius was already sick, although this doesn't appear in the play. Octavius seemed always to be sick before a battle. In this case, he fell sick at Dyrrhachium (on the coast of what is now Albania) and had to be carried by litter the 250 miles to Philippi.

Cassius opposed battle, maintaining that by waiting it out, the enemy would sooner or later have to retreat and that the effect would be one of victory for the conspirators. He was manifestly correct in this and Antony, putting himself grimly in the conspirators' place, was sure that was exactly what they would do.

Antony still did not count on the egregious stupidity of Brutus. Brutus again opposed Cassius and favored immediate battle. Once again Brutus insisted on having his way. Once again Cassius gave in.

> … the Hybla bees

A parley between the opposing commanders was arranged before the battle. Perhaps an accommodation could be arranged. That could not be, however, for the conversation quickly degenerated into recriminations. At one point, Cassius refers bitterly to Antony's oratory (thinking perhaps of the funeral speech) and says:

> But for your words, they rob the Hybla bees,
> And leave them honeyless.

—Act V, scene i, lines 34-35

Hybla was a town in Sicily, on the southern slopes of Mount Etna, and some forty miles northwest of Syracuse. It was famous, almost proverbial, for its honey.

> … Brutus, thank yourself

In the wordy quarrel, Antony does have the best of it and Cassius finally is forced to become aware of Brutus' misjudgments. He says to Brutus angrily:

> … Now, Brutus, thank yourself;
> This [Antony's] tongue had not offended so today,
> If Cassius might have ruled.

—Act V, scene i, lines 45-47

Surely he must have thought how, in all likelihood, the conspirators would have been long in control of Rome if only Antony had been killed along with Caesar, as he had advised.

> Was Cassius born

There is nothing, then, but to make ready for the actual battle. Cassius is seriously depressed, perhaps because it has been borne in upon him, forcefully, how wrong Brutus has been all through, and because he bitterly regrets all the times he gave in wrongly.

It is now October 42 b.c., more than two and a half years since the assassination of Caesar, and Cassius says to his aide:

> Messala,
> This is my birthday; as this very day
> Was Cassius born.

—Act V, scene i, lines 70-72

Since we don't know in what year Cassius was born, we can't say how old he was on the day of the Battle of Philippi. However, Plutarch refers to him as older than Brutus (a view Shakespeare adopts) and Brutus may have been born in 85 b.c. It would seem then that Cassius must be in his mid-forties at least and possibly pushing fifty.

Cassius does not find the fact that the battle will be fought on his birthday to be a good omen. He does not want to fight it. He says to Messala:

> Be thou my witness that against my will
> (As Pompey was) am I compelled to set
> Upon one battle all our liberties.

—Act V, scene i, lines 73-75

This is a reference to the fact that it is Brutus, not Cassius, who is pushing for battle. Cassius, who let himself be overruled, reminds himself, sadly, that Pompey was similarly forced into battle at Pharsalia, six years before, by the hotheads among his councilors, when cautious delay might have served his cause better.

> … I held Epicurus strong

To unavailing regret that he had allowed himself to be swayed by Brutus, Cassius finds trouble in supernatural omens. He says:

> You know that I held Epicurus strong,
> And his opinion; now I change my mind,
> And partly credit things that do presage.

—Act V, scene i, lines 76-78

Epicurus of Samos was a Greek philosopher who was a contemporary of the Zeno who had founded Stoicism. Epicurus' philosophy (Epicureanism) adopted the beliefs of certain earlier Greek philosophers who viewed the universe as made up of tiny particles called atoms. All change consisted of the random breakup and rearrangement of groups of these atoms and there was little room in the Epicurean thought for any purposeful direction of man and the universe by gods. Omens and divine portents were considered empty superstition.

Now, however, Cassius begins to waver. It seems two eagles, having accompanied the army from Sardis to Philippi, have now flown away, as though good luck were departing. On the other hand, all sorts of carrion birds are now gathering, as though bad luck were

arriving.

Cassius' pessimism forces him to question Brutus as to his intentions in case the battle is lost. Brutus answers in high Stoic fashion. His actions will follow:

> Even by the rule of that philosophy [Stoicism]
> By which I did blame Cato for the death
> Which he did give himself. ..

—Act V, scene i, lines 100-2

Stoicism held it wrong to seek refuge in suicide. The good man must meet his fate, whatever it is, unmoved. Cassius asks, sardonically, if Brutus is ready, then, in case of defeat, to be led in triumph behind the conqueror's chariot through the Roman streets (and, undoubtedly, with the jeers of the Roman populace ringing in his ears).

At once, Brutus' Stoicism fails him. As long as his Stoic demeanor brings him praise, it is well. If it is going to bring him disgrace he abandons it But he does so with characteristic self-praise:

> No, Cassius, no; think not, thou noble Roman
> That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome;
> He bears too great a mind.

—Act V, scene i, lines 110-12

Since both plan to die in case of defeat, they may never meet again. Brutus says:

> Forever, and forever, farewell, Cassius!

—Act V, scene i, line 116

Cassius answers in kind and both are now ready for the battle, which takes up the rest of the play.

> … the word too early

On both sides there was double command. Cassius on the seaward side opposed Antony; Brutus on the inland side opposed Octavius. The fortunes differed on the two flanks. Brutus had the advantage over Octavius and advanced vigorously. He sends messages of victory to the other flank by Messala, saying:

> … I perceive
> But cold demeanour in Octavius' wing,
> And sudden push gives them the overthrow.
> Ride, ride, Messala!

—Act V, scene ii, lines 3-6

But even now, in the midst of victory, Brutus judges wrongly. Brutus should, at all cost, have kept his part of the army from advancing in such a way that they could not support the other part in case of need. Instead, his men are overvictorious and fall to looting, when they ought to have wheeled down upon Antony's men.

Antony's army manages instead to drive hard against Cassius' wing. That wing breaks and flies and can receive no help. Titinius, Cassius' aide, says bitterly:

> O Cassius, Brutus gave the word too early,
> Who, having some advantage on Octavius,
> Took it too eagerly; his soldiers fell to spoil,
> Whilst we by Antony are all enclosed.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 5-8

> In Parthia …

Cassius' depression now costs him the final price. He does not realize the exact magnitude of Brutus' victory and therefore does not understand that even allowing for his own defeat, the battle is no worse than drawn.

A band of Brutus' horsemen making their way toward him is mistaken by him for the enemy. When his aide, Titinius, reconnoitering, embraces them gladly, the nearsighted Cassius thinks he is taken prisoner and that his own capture is imminent.

Cassius therefore calls his servant, Pindarus, saying:

In Parthia did I take thee prisoner;
And then I swore thee, saving of thy life,
That whatsoever I did bid thee do,
Thou shouldst attempt it.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 37-40

In Parthia, at the Battle of Carrhae, eleven years before, Cassius had carried through the greatest military achievement of his life. He had carefully husbanded the downhearted remnants of a defeated army and had safely brought them back to Syria.

He had not despaired then, but he did now. He orders his slave to kill him with the same sword that had once pierced Caesar. It is done and Cassius dies.

The last of all Romans …

When the news of Cassius' death is brought to Brutus, he comes to view the body and says:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!
Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 94-96

His eulogy over Cassius is:

The last of all Romans, fare thee well!
It is impossible that ever Rome
Should breed thy fellow…

—Act V, scene iii, lines 99-101

The statement is a gross exaggeration. Except for his conduct at the Battle of Carrhae, Cassius had shown little real ability. Even in organizing the successful conspiracy that killed Caesar, his weakness in allowing the stupid Brutus to guide affairs ruined all.

Caesar, now be still

Shakespeare has the battle continuing as though it were all one piece. That is not so in actual history.

After the drawn battle *in* which Cassius killed himself unnecessarily and Brutus was victorious on his wing, the two armies withdrew to lick their wounds.

Brutus' army still held the stronger position and, what's more, Brutus controlled the sea approaches so that supplies were denied Antony and Octavius. He had but to stay where he was and he would still win.

But he could not. The habit of wrong judgments could not be broken and this time there wasn't even Cassius present to argue vainly with him. After twenty days he marched to the attack again in a straightforward head-to-head battle.

He lost again, brought the remnants back to a strong position once again, and might have sold his last bit dear, but that his soldiers refused to fight any more.

There was nothing left to do but find somebody to kill him. This service was performed for him by his servant, Strato, who held the sword while Brutus ran upon it, saying:

> Caesar, now be still:
> I killed not thee with half so good a will.

—Act V, scene v, lines 50-51

To the end the talk is of Caesar…

> the noblest Roman of them all

There remains only the eulogy to be delivered over Brutus. Antony, surveying the dead body, says:

> This was the noblest Roman of them all.
> All the conspirators save only he
> Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
> He, only in a general honest thought
> And common good to all, made one of them.

—Act V, scene v, lines 68-72

Plutarch reports that "it was said" that Antony had, on a number of occasions, said something like this. Was it to win over those who had been on Brutus' side for the war that was to follow between himself and Octavius? Was it out of gratitude, since Brutus had refused to allow Antony to be killed on the ides of March? Did Antony really believe what he said?

In terms of Shakespeare's play, this final eulogy is so devastatingly wrong, it can be accepted only as irony. How can we possibly follow Antony in saying that Brutus was the only one who didn't act out of envy, when Shakespeare shows us that he was the only one who *surely* acted out of envy.

In the great seduction scene in Act I, scene ii, Cassius turns all his arguments against Brutus' weak point, his monstrous vanity. He paints a world in which Caesar is all and Brutus nothing, knowing that Brutus cannot bear such a thought. Finally, he makes the comparison a brutally direct one:

> Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that "Caesar"?
> Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
> Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
> Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
> Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em,
> "Brutus" will start a spirit as soon as "Caesar."

—Act I, scene ii, lines 142-47

It might be argued that Cassius was speaking generally, comparing Caesar to any other Roman citizen, but the fact is that he made the comparison to *Brutus* specifically, and Brutus listened. Take this together with Brutus' character as painstakingly revealed in every other facet of the play and we can be certain that he was *not* the only conspirator not driven by envy. On the contrary, he was the one conspirator who was driven *only* by envy.

12. The Tragedy of Antony And Cleopatra

I 1607 Shakespeare returned to North's edition of Plutarch, from which eight years before he had taken material for *Julius Caesar*. Using Plutarch's biography of Mark Antony, Shakespeare wrote what was virtually a continuation of the earlier play, and made it the most Plutarchian of the three plays he derived from that source.

Antony and Cleopatra begins almost at the point where *Julius Caesar* had left off.

Brutus and Cassius have been defeated at the double battle at Philippi in 42 b.c. by the troops under Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar. These two, together with Lepidus, the third member of the Triumvirate (see page I-301), are now in a position to divide the Roman realm among themselves.

Octavius Caesar took western Europe for his third, with the capital at Rome itself. It was what he could best use, for it left him with the Senate and the political power-center of the realm. Octavius was a politician and the battles he could best fight (and win) were battles of words with the minds of men at stake.

Lepidus was awarded the province of Africa, centering about the city of Carthage. It was an inconsiderable portion for an inconsiderable man, and Lepidus was and remained a mere appendage of Octavius Caesar. Lepidus grew important only when someone was required to act as go-between where the two major partners were concerned.

Mark Antony had the East and this suited him very well. Except for the days immediately following Julius Caesar's assassination, Antony had never gotten along well in Rome. He preferred the Eastern provinces, which were far the richer and more sophisticated portion of the Roman realm. Mark Antony was a hedonist; he knew how to appreciate pleasure, and in the great cities of the East he knew he would find it.

He was also a soldier who welcomed war, and in the East he knew he would find that too. The Parthians were to be found there. Eleven years before they had destroyed a Roman army (see page I-257) and for that they had never been punished. Antony hoped to deliver that punishment.

> … this dotage of our general's…

All Antony's plans went awry, however, when in 41 b.c. he encountered Cleopatra, the fascinating Queen of Egypt. He fell

sufficiently in love with her to forget the necessity of beating the Parthians and to neglect the threat of the slow, crafty advance of Octavius Caesar in Rome.

The love story of Antony and Cleopatra has captured the imagination of the world, and has left generations sighing. (And never has it been as ap-pealingly and as majestically described as in this play.) In its own time, however, the affair must have been viewed with impatience by those soldiers who were bound to Antony and who found themselves neglected, their chance for loot and glory vanishing.

The play opens in Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, the capital of Egypt Two soldiers, Demetrius and Philo, come onstage. Philo, who knows the situation, expresses his soldierly displeasure to Demetrius, who apparently is a newcomer fresh from Rome. Philo says:

> Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front.

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-6

The expression "tawny front" means "dark face" and this represents a misconception concerning Cleopatra that has been common in later times and that can never be corrected, in all likelihood. Because she was the ruler of an African land and because she was an "Egyptian," she has been presumed to be dark, dusky, swarthy, even perhaps part Negress. She may have been dark, to be sure, but she was no darker, necessarily, than any other Greek, for she was *not* of Egyptian descent.

Egypt had become the kingdom of Cleopatra's forebears back in 323 b.c. when Alexander the Great had died. Alexander had conquered the entire Persian Empire, of which Egypt was part, and after his death one of his generals, Ptolemaios (or Ptolemy, as he is known in English), seized Egypt. In 305 b.c. Ptolemy adopted the title of long and from then on, for two and a half centuries, his descendants, each named Ptolemy, ruled Egypt.

Ptolemy I, the first of the kings of Ptolemaic Egypt, was a Macedonian, a native of the Greek-speaking kingdom of Macedon, lying just north of Greece proper. All the Ptolemies married Greeks and all the rulers of Ptolemaic Egypt, down to and including Cleopatra, were completely Greek. Cleopatra's father had been

Ptolemy XI, the great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson of Ptolemy I. There had been a number of Ptolemaic queens, by the way, who bore the name of Cleopatra (a perfectly good Greek name meaning "glory of her father," and not Egyptian at all). The one in Shakespeare's play is actually Cleopatra VII, but she is the only one remembered today and the name without the numeral is enough. There is no danger of confusion with any of the first six.

The notion of Cleopatra as a dark African is carried on further as the speech continues, with Philo saying of Antony:

> His captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gypsy's lust.

—Act I, scene i, lines 6-10

The word "gypsy" means simply "Egyptian" here, but although Cleopatra was an Egyptian by nationality, she was not one by descent. Indeed, the true Egyptians were a "lower class" to the ruling Greeks, as the natives of India once were to the ruling British. Cleopatra would undoubtedly have been terribly offended to have been considered an "Egyptian."

Furthermore, the word "gypsy" by Shakespeare's time had come to be applied to a wandering group of men and women of unknown origin. Popular rumor had them coming from Egypt, hence "gypsy," but it is much more likely they came from India (see page I-149). To call Cleopatra a "gypsy," then, is to call up visions of swarthy women in markedly non-Western costume, both to Shakespeare's audience and our own.

> The triple pillar of the world. ..

Antony, Cleopatra, and their train of maids and eunuchs are entering now, and Philo says of Mark Antony, more bitterly still:

> Take but good note, and you shall see in him
> The triple pillar of the world transformed Into a strumpet's fool.

—Act I, scene i, lines 11-13

Antony is one of the three members of the Second Triumvirate. All three together support and rule the Roman realm, hence "triple pillar."

Rome is referred to here as "the world." In a way, it was to the ancients, for it included the entire Mediterranean basin and virtually all the lands that the Greeks and Romans considered "civilized."

Thus, in the Bible, the Gospel of St. Luke speaks of a decree by Caesar Augustus (the very same Octavius Caesar of this play-but a generation later) to the effect that the Roman realm be taxed. The biblical verse phrases it this way: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1).

Of course, such phraseology is exaggerated. The Romans (and Shakespeare too) knew that the Roman government didn't rule over all the earth. There were barbarian tribes north of the northern limits of Rome, tribes who would make their presence felt all too painfully in a couple of centuries. And even if the view is confined to civilized areas, the Romans (and Shakespeare too) knew that the Roman government didn't rule over all the civilized earth. To the east of the eastern limits of Rome was the Parthian Empire, a civilized region that had already beaten Rome once and continued to remain a deadly danger to it. (There were also civilizations in China and India, but these lay beyond the Roman horizon.)

In this particular play, however, the transmutation of Rome into the world is dramatically advantageous. Antony is playing for the rule of the whole realm, and loses it, partly through his own miscalculations, and partly through his love affair with Cleopatra. It becomes intensely dramatic, then, to be able to say, he "lost the world." It becomes even more dramatic to say he lost it for love.

In fact, the English poet John Dryden in 1678 wrote his version of the tale of Antony and Cleopatra (far inferior to Shakespeare's), which he called, in the most romantic possible vein, *All for Love; or the World Well Lost.*

… tell me how much

Antony and Cleopatra speak now and they are engaged in the foolish love talk of young lovers. Cleopatra is pouting:

If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

—Act I, scene i, line 14

Yet Cleopatra is not a schoolgirl. She is an experienced woman who has lived and loved fully. She was born in 69 b.c., so she was twenty-eight years old when she met Antony.

Cleopatra's father, Ptolemy XI, died in 51 b.c. and her younger brother, the thirteen-year-old Ptolemy XII, succeeded to the throne. Cleopatra, then nearly eighteen, ruled jointly with him. She got tangled up in palace politics, however, and fled to Syria to raise an army with which to seize undisputed control of the country.

It was at this time, 48 b.c., that Pompey appeared in Egypt, fleeing from the defeat inflicted on him at Pharsalia by Julius Caesar (see page I-257). Pompey was killed by the Egyptians and Julius Caesar landed in Alexandria soon after.

Cleopatra realized that the real power in the Mediterranean basin rested with Rome. Egypt was the only remaining independent power of any consequence along all the Mediterranean shore, and even she could not do a thing without Roman permission. She couldn't even play her game of internal politics if Rome seriously objected. Cleopatra also realized that Julius Caesar was now the most powerful Roman. If she could gain him to her side, then, he would certainly place her on the throne.

She had herself smuggled in to Julius Caesar (so the story goes) wrapped in a carpet. The later storytellers insist that when the carpet was unwrapped, she stepped out nude.

Julius Caesar did see the merits of her case (however persuaded) and spent a year in Alexandria, needlessly interfering in Egyptian politics and running considerable danger himself. During this interval, Cleopatra is supposed to have been his mistress. (He was fifty-two years old at the time, she twenty-one.) At least she bore a son which, she insisted, was his, and called him Ptolemy Caesar. The son was known, popularly, as Caesarion.

In 47 b.c. Caesar left Alexandria, went to Asia Minor to fight a brief battle, then turned westward to win victories in Africa and Spain, and finally came back to Rome as Dictator. He was assassinated just as he was about to make himself king.

There is a story that he brought Cleopatra to Rome and that she managed to get away and return to Egypt after the assassination. This, however, is based on an ambiguous line in one of Cicero's letters, and is very probably not so. Caesar was far too clever a politician to complicate his plans by bringing a "foreign queen" to Rome and setting her up as his mistress. What's more, Cleopatra was far too clever a queen to want to leave her turbulent country for others to

control and loot just so she could be a hated mistress to an aging Roman politician.

She very likely stayed in Alexandria between 47 b.c., when Caesar left, and 41 b.c., when she met Mark Antony.

> Fulvia perchance is angry. ..

The love murmurings of Antony and Cleopatra are interrupted, however, by messengers from Rome. Antony is annoyed at having his mood punctured and wants the messengers to be brief and leave. Cleopatra, however, is always petulant at any mention of Rome, any hint of the great affairs that might take Antony away from her as once they had taken Julius Caesar. She grows peevishly sarcastic:

> Nay, hear them, Antony.
> Fulvia perchance is angry…

—Act I, scene i, lines 19-20

Fulvia is Mark Antony's third wife; a fierce and ambitious woman, not inferior to Cleopatra in fire, but, presumably, lacking Cleopatra's sexual fascination. At least she didn't fascinate Antony.

Antony was her third husband. Her first husband had been that Publius Clodius who had been the occasion for Julius Caesar's divorce from his second wife (see page I-261) and who had turned into a gang leader who made Cicero his particular prey.

When Cicero was killed as a result of the proscriptions that followed the establishment of the Second Triumvirate (see page I-306), Fulvia had his head brought to her as proof of his death. When it was in her hands, she drove her hairpin through the dead tongue of the great orator with savage glee, as vengeance against the eloquence that had so lacerated two of her husbands, Clodius and Antony.

Antony had headed east, after his division of the world with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, without bothering to take the formidable Fulvia with him. (No doubt that was not an oversight, either.) Any mention of his fierce wife undoubtedly embarrassed Mark Antony, and Cleopatra knew it.

> … the scarce-bearded Caesar …

Cleopatra went further than that. The news might not be merely

from Fulvia; it might be from Octavius Caesar. She says:

> … or who knows
> If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
> His pow'rful mandate to you.

—Act I, scene i, lines 20-22

This must sting. Antony is forty-one years old when the play opens; a grizzled warrior more than a score of years in the field. Octavius Caesar is nineteen years his junior, only twenty-two years old now. Antony had to resent the fact that so young a man should be able to hold himself on an equal plane with the mature warrior.

(Incidentally, in this play Octavius Caesar is always referred to as "Caesar," where he was always referred to as "Octavius" in *Julius Caesar*. I shall call him "Octavius Caesar" in order to avoid confusing him with Julius Caesar.)

Cleopatra gets what she wants. The baited Antony cries out:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space,

—Act I, scene i, lines 33-34

He refuses to hear the messengers and leaves.

> … prized so slight

The soldiers, Philo and Demetrius, who have watched these proceedings with surprise and disapproval, cannot believe that Antony can be so careless of his own interests. Demetrius says:

> Is Caesar with Antonius prized so slight?

—Act I, scene i, line 56

Demetrius, fresh from Rome, knows what Octavius Caesar is doing, if Antony does not.

Octavius Caesar, young though he was, was one of the master

politicians of history. He lost no time in frivolity of any kind. He was a cold, shrewd man, who never made a serious mistake, and whose destiny it was to carry through to a conclusion the plans of his great-uncle, Julius Caesar. He was not, perhaps, as brilliant as the great Julius in war or literature, but he was even wiser in politics, for he carried through the necessary governmental reforms without ever making use of the hated word "king," but making himself in the end far greater than a king.

Nor did Octavius Caesar have the romantic appeal of Antony, or Antony's ability to orate, or his talent for putting on a kind of bluff, hail-fellow-well-met exterior that made him tremendously popular with the soldiers. Octavius could never be loved till age, and the realization at last of his greatness, had made him a father figure to the people.

Antony always underrated him and did not realize that the young man was building a network of alliances with politicians and generals, binding them to himself by self-interest rather than love, and weaving a net that would end by making him all-powerful.

Shakespeare too underprizes him, but this is necessary for the sake of the drama. The audience sympathy must be with the lovable profligate and not with the cool politician.

Nevertheless, though all audiences must "root" for Antony (for Shakespeare wills it so, and wins me over too), truth compels one to say that Octavius Caesar was by far the greater man of the two and that it would have been a world tragedy if circumstance had allowed Mark Antony to beat him.

> … the common liar… Demetrius goes on to say:
> I am full sorry
> That he approves the common liar, who
> Thus speaks of him at Rome;
>
> —Act I, scene i, lines 59-61

Octavius Caesar, in his ceaseless war against Antony, made skillful use of propaganda. When the two triumvirs were at peace, Octavius carefully sapped the other's strength in the West by spreading tales of his profligacy.

Cicero's fiery and vituperative speeches in the last year of his life had covered Antony with slime. And though Cicero's invective was remorselessly exaggerated, much of it stuck. Antony, who did carouse and who loved luxury, gave all too much ground for believing much worse about him than was true.

Octavius Caesar made use of Cicero's speeches and also made use of the new matter that Antony offered. Antony was with this "foreign queen." Rome had fought many wars with Eastern monarchs and it was easy to escalate this affair with Cleopatra into threatened treason.

In contrast, Octavius Caesar never stopped playing the part of the true Roman, industrious, grave, honorable, and devoted to public affairs.

He himself was in love with no exotic temptress. He had been married twice to fine Roman girls. He had had no sons, though. His first wife was childless and his second had one daughter. He was soon to marry a third and last time, however, to the best one yet, a girl named Livia.

Livia was not yet twenty, but she was already married, had a fine young son, and was pregnant with (as it turned out) a second son. She divorced her husband to marry Octavius Caesar, but there was no stigma attached to divorce in those days. She became a model Roman matron, who remained Octavius' wife for the rest of his long life; they remained married for fifty-two years, a phenomenal length of time for a marriage in those days. Livia then lived on as his revered widow for fifteen more years. What's more, although she had no children by Octavius Caesar, her own children by her earlier marriage proved capable warriors and one of them succeeded his stepfather to the rule of all Rome.

The city of Rome was filled, then, with talk of how wicked Mark Antony was and how noble and good Octavius Caesar was, and this played an important part in Octavius' schemes. It was part of Antony's folly that he continually gave men cause to look upon these exaggerated rumors as true (as Demetrius points out) and that he never made an effort to set up effective counterpropaganda of his own. He was entirely too trusting in his own reputation and capacity as a warrior. -As though that were everything.

… Herod of Jewry…

The scene shifts to Cleopatra's palace, where we find the Queen's ladies in waiting having fun at the expense of a soothsayer, who nevertheless makes some statements which turn out to have dramatic irony. He predicts, for instance, that Cleopatra's lady in waiting Charmian will outlive her mistress, and so she does in the end-by about a minute.

At one point, though, Charmian asks him to predict some ridiculous fortunes, including:

… let me have a child at fifty, to whom

Herod of Jewry may do homage.. .

—Act I, scene ii, lines 27-28

This serves to set the time of the play in a way peculiarly useful to Shakespeare's audience. It is the time in which Herod "the Great" is on the throne of Judea.

Judea had lost its independence in 63 b.c. (twenty-two years before the time this play opens), when Pompey (see page I-255) had absorbed it into the Roman realm. It had been given some internal freedom, however, and Pompey made the capable Antipater its king. Antipater was from Idumaea (the biblical Edom) and was not a Jew by birth, though he had become one by conversion. He was assassinated in 43 b.c., just a year after Julius Caesar had been.

His eldest surviving son, Herod, also a converted Jew, and now thirty years old, was the natural successor, but the Eastern provinces were in a ferment. Brutus and Cassius were trying to strengthen themselves for the fight against Mark Antony and Octavius, and the Parthians were doing their best to take advantage of the disorder in Rome. In fact, after the Battle of Philippi, the Parthians swarmed all over Syria and Judea, and Herod was forced to flee.

He came to Antony for support, and this Antony gave him and continued to give him even though Cleopatra bitterly opposed Herod. Herod became King of Judea, then, at just about the time that Charmian refers to him so jestingly. Still, things didn't settle sufficiently for Herod actually to enter Jerusalem and take the throne till 37 B.C.

The reference to the child to whom Herod might do homage is clear enough too. Whenever the political fortunes of the Jews declined, then-hopes for an ideal king or "anointed one" rose. (The Hebrew word for "anointed one" is "Messiah.")

Now that the briefly independent Jewish kingdom under the Maccabees had fallen and the Romans were in control, Messianic hopes rose. All Judea seemed to wait for some child to be born who would be the ideal king and under whom the world system would finally break apart, with Jerusalem becoming the capital of the world and all the nations confessing the one true God.

Undoubtedly, non-Jews heard of these longings and were amused. Charmian suggests, then, that perhaps when she is fifty she may give birth to this Messiah, this true King of the Jews, to whom Herod, a mere earthly king, will have to do homage. And, indeed, Jesus was born before the end of Herod's reign at a time when Charmian, had

she lived, would have been not much more than fifty.

> Good Isis.. .

The mischievous Charmian also asks the soothsayer to prophesy for the courtier Alexas, who had brought the soothsayer to court for Cleopatra's amusement. She asks that a series of unsatisfactory wives be foretold for him. She says, laughingly:

> Good Isis, hear me this prayer,
> though thou deny me a matter of more weight: good Isis,
> I beseech thee!

—Act I, scene ii, lines 68-70

Isis was the chief goddess of the Egyptian pantheon. For the most part, the Egyptian deities made little impact on the culturally snobbish Greeks and, therefore, on the Western world, which draws most of its culture from Greek sources.

Isis was the chief exception. For one thing, she was an extraordinarily attractive goddess; a thoroughly human female amid an array of animal-headed deities. She plays a sympathetic role in the Egyptian version of the vegetation-cycle myth (see page I-5). Her brother-husband, Osiris, was killed through treachery by Set, the god of darkness. Osiris' body was cut to pieces and scattered throughout Egypt. The lovely and sorrowing Isis painstakingly searched the land, collected the pieces, put them together, and brought Osiris back to life.

Isis' influence was felt outside the borders of Egypt. As the beautiful "Queen of Heaven" her worship penetrated Rome itself in the dark days of Hannibal's onslaught, when the Romans felt the shortcomings of their own gods and snatched at others. In the days of the Roman Empire (in the centuries following the time of Antony and Cleopatra) temples to Isis were built and her rites celebrated, even in the far-off island of Britain, two thousand miles from the Nile.

After Christianity was established, the spell of Isis still continued to make itself felt. As the goddess of birth and motherhood, she was frequently portrayed with her child, Horus, on her lap. The popular concept of mother and child was transferred to Christianity in the form of the Virgin and the infant Jesus, so that the aura of Isis lingers over the world even now.

A Roman thought. ..

In comes Cleopatra in dark humor, for she can't find Antony. She says:

He was disposed to mirth; but on the sudden
A Roman thought hath struck him.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 83-84

The thought of the messengers and what the news might be had apparently gnawed at Antony. Part of him is Roman still, and he left to find them.

… my brother Lucius

The news is disturbing indeed, for it deals with war, and a particularly embarrassing one too, for it is Antony's wife, of all people, who is conducting it. The Messenger says:

Fulvia thy wife first came into the field.

—Act I, scene ii, line 89

Fulvia, her eyesight sharpened, perhaps, by the anger and humiliation she felt at her husband's preoccupation with the Egyptian enchantress, saw what Mark Antony did not-that Octavius Caesar would win it all if he were not stopped.

She therefore did her best to instigate war against Octavius, raising an army and putting it in the field. It probably did not escape her calculation that if she caused enough mischief, her husband's hand would be forced and he would have to come back to Italy to fight-and rejoin her.

Mark Antony is stupefied. He asks:

Against my brother Lucius?

—Act I, scene ii, line 90

Lucius was Mark Antony's younger brother, and had held a variety of important political posts. In 41 b.c., after the Battle of Philippi and the following division of Rome among the triumvirs, Lucius Antony was made consul.

Actually, the consulate had become an unimportant office by now, for Octavius Caesar was the only real power in Rome, but it still had its prestige. It was a bow to Mark Antony's importance that his brother should be consul. Furthermore, it gave Mark Antony a foothold, so to speak, in the capital, though unfortunately for Antony, not a very competent one.

It was Lucius Antony's duty as consul to oppose the rebellious Fulvia, so that at the very first they seemed to be at war with each other. This was what occasioned Antony's surprise, that his wife should begin a war that would have to be against his brother.

Apparently, that war did not last long. Fulvia talked Lucius into joining her. The Messenger explains:

> … soon that war had end, and the time's state
> Made friends of them, pointing their force 'gainst Caesar,
> Whose better issue in the war, from Italy
> Upon the first encounter drave them.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 92-95

It wasn't quite that quick a victory for Octavius Caesar, but it was quick enough. Octavius' armies drove the forces of Fulvia and Lucius northward and penned them up in the city of Perusia (the modern Perugia, a hundred miles north of Rome). There the forces lay under siege for some months before the city was taken. This short conflict is called the Perusine War.

The war was a disaster for Mark Antony, because he knew everyone would believe that he was behind it (though he was not) and it would give Octavius Caesar all the excuse he needed to picture himself as the innocent victim of wanton aggression.

If Fulvia had to fight, she might at least not have been so quickly defeated, so that Antony might have had something to offset the propaganda victory that had been handed Octavius Caesar. Worse still was the manner of the defeat. The food supply in the city was small and it was reserved for the soldiers of Fulvia and Lucius, who let the civil population starve. Moreover, the final surrender was made on condition that the army's leaders be spared. So they were, but the city itself was sacked in 40 b.c.

This callousness on the part of Fulvia and Lucius Antony, who saved their skins at the expense of thousands of common people, was not lost on the Roman populace. They were execrated and some of the execrations were bound to fall on Mark Antony, whose reputation in Italy took another serious drop.

… with his Parthian force

But there is worse news still. It is not only inside the Roman realm that army fights army. The external enemy is tearing at the Eastern provinces and has reached a peak of power. The Messenger says:

Labienus-
This is stiff news-hath with his
Parthian force Extended Asia; from Euphrates
His conquering banner shook, from Syria
To Lydia and to Ionia,

—Act I, scene ii, lines 100-4

Quintus Labienus had fought on the side of Brutus and Cassius and had refused to abandon the cause even after the Battle of Philippi and the death of the two conspirators. Instead, he fled to the Parthians, whose armies hovered along the course of the Euphrates River, east of Asia Minor and Syria.

Parthia was originally the name of an eastern province of the Persian Empire. It was conquered by Alexander the Great and, after Alexander's death in 323 b.c., it was incorporated hi the Seleucid Empire (see page I-183). The Seleucid grip remained rather loose.

In 171 b.c., while Antiochus IV was the Seleucid king (see page I-183), Mithradates I became ruler of Parthia. He made his land fully independent, and under the weak successors of Antiochus IV, the Parthians drove westward. In 147 b.c. they took over control of the Tigris-Euphrates valley, the home of the ancient civilizations of Sumeria and Babylonia, and in 129 b.c. they founded their own capital of Ctesiphon on the Tigris River.

The last Seleucid kings were penned into the constricted area of Syria itself, with Antioch as their capital, and in 64 b.c. that was made into a Roman province by Pompey.

Across the Euphrates, Rome and Parthia now faced each other. Under Orodes II, Parthia defeated Crassus in 53 b.c.; he was still king

when the Battle of Philippi was fought in 42 b.c. He remained eager to do Rome all the harm he could and when Labienus, a trained Roman soldier, defected to him, he was delighted and promptly placed a Parthian army at his disposal.

In 40 b.c. the Parthians under Labienus moved westward, and in short order almost all of Syria and Asia Minor was occupied, with various Roman garrisons joining the renegade general. Lydia was an ancient kingdom in western Asia Minor (and still served as the name of a region of the peninsula when it was under Roman domination), while Ionia was the territory along the western seacoast of Asia Minor. The mention of the two districts by the Messenger shows that all of the peninsula was now under Parthian control. (It was from this Parthian advance that Herod fled, and in 40 b.c. the Parthians, for the only time in their history, marched into Jerusalem.)

All this is bitter for Mark Antony, for it took place in his half of the realm. He, the great soldier, has done nothing to prevent it, and he himself realizes that to Rome it will now look as though he lounged languidly with Cleopatra even while foreign armies were tearing Rome apart.

Mark Antony must realize that while he can get away with mere profligacy as long as he can win battles, the loss of his military reputation as well will cause him to lose everything. He mutters:

> These strong Egyptian fetters
> I must break Or lose myself in dotage.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 117-18

> From Sicyon…

But another Messenger waits and Antony calls for him:

> From Sicyon, ho, the news!

—Act I, scene ii, line 114

Sicyon is a Greek city in the northwest Peloponnesus, fifty miles west of Athens. It was at the peak of its power about 600 b.c. when it was the rule of three generations of benevolent "tyrants," a one-man rule that lasted longer without interruption than in any other case in

Greek history. After the fall of the tyranny in 565 b.c., Sicyon was usually dominated by the larger and more powerful cities of Sparta or Corinth. Only after Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 b.c. did Sicyon experience another period of prominence. When Corinth was rebuilt, however, Sicyon began its final decline and the event that the Messenger is about to tell is very nearly the last of importance in its history.

The news is brief, for the Messenger says:

> Fulvia thy wife is dead.

—Act I, scene ii, line 119

Fulvia reached Sicyon in her flight from Italy and then died there in 40 b.c. Antony is stricken. Now that she is gone, he recognizes in her that energy and drive which has recently been missing in himself and says:

> / must from this enchanting queen break off:
> Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
> My idleness doth hatch.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 129-3la

> … Enobarbus

Antony is doing his best to make up his mind to leave Cleopatra, and he calls his most reliable aide:

> Ho now, Enobarbus!

—Act I, scene ii, line 131b

Enobarbus is a shortened form of Ahenobarbus, and the person being called is, in full, Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus. His father had fought with Pompey against Caesar and had died at the Battle of Pharsalus.

Enobarbus himself had fought with Brutus and Cassius against

Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar and had commanded the fleet, in fact. Even after the Battle of Philippi, Enobarbus had held out as a pirate until he was won over by Mark Antony in 40 B.C., just before this play opens. He then became one of the most ardent of Antony's adherents.

> … Sextus Pompeius

It is not surprising that Antony must leave for Rome. He must take care of the Parthian menace and he cannot do it if he leaves an angry Octavius Caesar in his rear. He must mend fences there, explain away the actions of his wife and brother, and patch up an understanding. Then, and only then, can he turn on the Parthians. In addition, there is trouble in the West, for that matter. Antony says to Enobarbus:

> … the letters too
> Of many our contriving friends in Rome
> Petition us at home. Sextus Pompeius
> Hath given the dare to Caesar and commands
> The empire of the sea.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 183-87

Sextus Pompeius (also called Pompey the Younger) was the younger son of Pompey the Great. He had been in Greece with his father when the Battle of Pharsalus had been lost and he was in the ship with his father when Pompey fled to Egypt. He remained in the ship as his father was rowed to the Egyptian shore and witnessed his father being stabbed and killed when he reached that shore. He was about twenty-seven years old then.

Some years later Sextus was in Spain when his older brother, Gnaeus Pompeius, held out against Julius Caesar. He was at the Battle of Munda, in which Gnaeus was defeated and slain in 45 b.c. (see page I-258). Sextus escaped and during the confusion that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar, quietly built up his strength at sea.

By 40 b.c. he was in control of the Mediterranean. He had seized Sicily soon after the assassination and was still holding it. This cut off Rome's grain supply, part of which came from Sicily itself, with the rest coming from Africa and Egypt in ships that Sextus could easily intercept. What it amounted to was that this younger son of Pompey had his hand at the throat of Rome, and Octavius Caesar, who lacked

a navy, could do nothing about it.

Naturally, since nothing succeeds like success, there was the danger that Sextus' increasing power would breed still further access of power. As Antony says:

> Our slippery people,
> Whose love is never linked to the deserver
> Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
> Pompey the Great and all his dignities
> Upon his son;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 187-91

(In this play Sextus' lines are identified as those of "Pompey," but I shall call him Sextus or Sextus Pompeius in order not to confuse him with his father, Pompey the Great.)

> … Nilus' slime…

Enobarbus tells Cleopatra of the forthcoming separation (Antony has been with her a year), and she goes seeking Antony himself to confirm the news.

Poor Antony is in a dilemma. He is no match for Cleopatra and can only fluster and fume. He tries to be consoling and reassuring, but she will have none of it. He even tries to explain to her that her greatest fear (that he will return to his wife, Fulvia) is gone, since Fulvia is dead. She turns even that against him, saying:

> O most false love!
> Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
> With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,
> In Fulvia's death, how mine received shall be.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 62-65

In view of what is to happen in Act IV, this is dramatic irony, for Antony will react quite differently to the report of Cleopatra's death.

In frustration, Antony protests that he is faithful to her even though he must leave. He says:

> By the fire

That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence
Thy soldier-servant …

—Act I, scene iii, lines 68-70

Egypt is a desert land where it never rains. What makes life possible there is the presence of the Nile River. (The name is of unknown origin. The Egyptians called it simply "The River"; but the Greeks named it "Neilos," which is "Nilus" in Latin spelling and "Nile" to us.)

The Nile is an unfailing source of water for drinking and irrigation. Once a year, moreover, its level rises as the snow on the distant Abyssinian and Kenyan mountains melt. The river waters flood the banks and deposit silt brought down from east-central Africa. The water-soaked fresh soil is outstandingly fertile and in the hot African sun ("the fire that quickens Nilus' slime") generous harvests grow.

… this Herculean Roman…

When Cleopatra's perversity finally moves Antony to rage, she still fleers at him, accusing him of merely pretending anger. She says:

Look, prithee, Charmian,
How this Herculean Roman does become
The carriage of his chafe.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 82-84

The sneer refers to one of Antony's more ridiculous pretensions (though it was taken seriously in his time). Roman noblemen liked to pretend they were descended from the gods and from mythical heroes. The Julian family, of which Julius Caesar was a member, was supposed to have descended from Venus. In similar fashion, the Antonian family, of which Mark Antony was a member, claimed to be descended from Anton, a mythical son of Hercules. Mark Antony himself did everything he could to model himself on the strong man of legend.

In the end, then, Mark Antony is forced to leave angrily, defeated in the battle of words with Cleopatra.

… the queen of Ptolemy

The scene now shifts to Octavius Caesar's house in Rome. Octavius Caesar is not much better off in Rome than Mark Antony is in Alexandria. He too is beset with problems, and he is annoyed that Mark Antony's inaction makes it necessary for himself to be all the more industrious. He is saying bitterly to Lepidus (the third member of the Triumvirate) as he reads a letter:

> From Alexandria
> This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he;

—Act I, scene iv, lines 3-7

The phrase "the queen of Ptolemy" brings up an additional point that made Cleopatra unpopular with the Romans. In ancient Egypt it had long been the custom of the Pharaohs to marry their sisters. Since the Pharaonic blood was considered divine, it would not do to have one marry a mortal. Only a woman of the same line was a fit consort. At least, that was the rationalization.

When the Ptolemies ruled Egypt, they made it a point to adopt as many Egyptian customs as possible, in order to keep the populace quiet. This included brother-sister marriages, and Cleopatra was born of a family that had many times been involved in incest (see page I-185), something that was as repulsive to the Romans as it would be to us.

In fact, when Cleopatra's father died, Cleopatra and her brother, Ptolemy XII,.were made joint rulers and were, in fact, married. It was expected that eventually they might have offspring who would succeed to the throne. Ptolemy XII, however, died in the course of Julius Caesar's small war in Alexandria in 48 b.c., and Cleopatra's rule was joined with a still younger brother, Ptolemy XIII.

Ptolemy XIII was only ten years old at the time, and in 44 B.C., when the news of Julius Caesar's assassination reached her, Cleopatra had the boy killed and then ruled jointly with her son, Caesarion, only three years old at the time. The new king was Ptolemy XIV.

Octavius Caesar's reference to her as "queen of Ptolemy" stressed the fact that she had been married to her brothers, and we can be sure that this was included in the whispering campaign that was conducted

against Mark Antony.

> … beaten from Modena…

Messages of disaster greet Octavius Caesar as they had greeted Antony. Octavius learns that Sextus Pompeius grows stronger along the coast and that pirates control the sea where Sextus himself does not. Daily Octavius Caesar's control over Rome grows shakier as its food supply dwindles. Octavius Caesar broods resentfully over the fact that he isn't being helped by Antony. Unaware that Antony is on his way westward, Octavius Caesar cries out:

> Antony
> Leave thy lascivious wassails. When thou once
> Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
> Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
> Did famine follow, whom thou fough'st against
> (Though daintily brought up) with patience more
> Than savages could suffer.

—Act I, scene iv, lines 55-61

The reference is to the period following the assassination of Julius Caesar and deals with events not mentioned in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The events fall in the interval between Acts III and IV of that play (see page I-301).

Decimus Brutus (called "Decius" by Shakespeare) was in control of Cisalpine Gaul in northern Italy, and Mark Antony led an army northward to attack him. Decius fortified himself in Mutina, the modern Modena, 220 miles north of Rome. While Mark Antony fought there, Octavius Caesar, back in Rome, persuaded the Senate to declare war against Antony and to send an army against him led by the consul Hirtius; then another, led by the other consul, Pansa.

Mark Antony left his brother, Lucius, to conduct the siege of Mutina with part of the army, and then led the remainder against the consuls. Antony was badly defeated, but both Roman consuls were killed. (This was a stroke of luck for Octavius, for with both consuls dead, he was in full control of a victorious army.)

Antony had to retreat over the Alps into Gaul, and that retreat was attended by extraordinary suffering and hardship. Antony, in one of his better times, shared that suffering with his men and did so with such stoic patience that he endeared himself to the army. The tale of

his nobility in this respect was undoubtedly told and retold with exaggeration, as we can see from the repulsive details Shakespeare has Octavius list:

> Thou didst drink
> The stale [urine] of horses and the gilded [scum-covered]
> puddle Which beasts would cough at.

—Act I, scene iv, lines 61-63

> The demi-Atlas.,.

Back in Alexandria, Cleopatra already misses Antony and is in a state of delicious self-pity. She says:

> Give me to drink mandragora.

—Act I, scene v, line 4

Mandragora is an older form of "mandrake," a plant of the potato family which is native to the Mediterranean region. It has its uses as a cathartic, emetic, and narcotic. Which effect predominates depends on the dose, but Cleopatra thinks of the narcotic aspect, for when asked why she wants it, she says:

> That I might sleep out this great gap of time
> My Antony is away.

—Act I, scene v, lines 5-6

She thinks longingly of Antony, saying:

> O, Charmian,
> Where think'st thou he is now?
> Stands he, or sits he?
> Or does he walk?
> Or is he on his horse?
> O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!
> Do bravely, horse, for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st?

The demi-Atlas of this earth. ..

—Act I, scene v, lines 18-23

Atlas was one of the Titans who warred against Jupiter (see page I-11). In fact, he may have been their general, for he was punished worse than the others. He was condemned to support the heavens on his shoulders.

As time went on, it became difficult to picture Atlas as holding up the sky. The Greeks learned more about astronomy and knew that there was no solid sky to support. The notion arose, then, of Atlas supporting the earth rather than the sky.

Cleopatra pictures Antony here as supporting the weight of the problems of the Roman world. He shared this weight with Octavius Caesar, of course, so he himself was but a demi-Atlas; that is, half an Atlas.

… Phoebus' amorous pinches…

In contrast, the self-pitying Cleopatra seems to herself to be ugly and old. She says:

Think on me,
That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black
And wrinkled deep in time. Broad-fronted Caesar,
When thou wast here above the ground, I was
A morsel for a monarch; and great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow;

—Act I, scene v, lines 27-32

Phoebus is, of course, the sun, and to be black with the sun's pinches would be to be sun-tanned. A queen like Cleopatra, however, would certainly not allow herself to grow sun-tanned. That was for peasant girls.

What is meant is that she is dark by nature because she dwelt in a tropic land. It is part of the Egyptian-Negress notion of Cleopatra, the usual false picture.

Nor is she honestly "wrinkled deep in time." At this point in the story, she is twenty-nine years old; past her first youth, perhaps, but

by no means old and wrinkled.

Still it is human for her to think of herself as she was nine years before, only twenty-one, when Julius Caesar knew her; and even earlier when she met not Pompey himself, but his older son, who bore the same name.

Her opulent throne…

But now comes a messenger to Cleopatra from Antony, with the gift of a pearl and with a pretty speech. He says:

"Say the firm Roman to great Egypt sends
This treasure of an oyster; at whose foot,
To mend the petty present, I will piece
Her opulent throne with kingdoms.
All the East (Say thou) shall call her mistress."

—Act I, scene v, lines 43-46

The story was indeed spread in Rome that Antony was planning to hand over Roman provinces to Cleopatra; even to make her Queen of Rome (with himself as king, of course); that a foreign ruler would thus raise an exotic throne upon the Capitol. In the end, this, more than anything else, was to embitter Rome against Antony.

Shakespeare gets a little ahead of history here. The threat of turning the East over to Cleopatra comes later.

At the moment, Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, each waist-deep in trouble, were going to have to be friends whether they liked it or not, for only by working together could they survive.

But Cleopatra is not concerned with practical politics now. She is delighted with Mark Antony's remembrance and is ashamed of herself for so much as remembering Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompeius. When Charmian teases her with her onetime love of Julius Caesar, she dismisses it with a much quoted line, saying:

My salad days,
When I was green in judgment, cold in blood,

—Act I, scene v, lines 73-74

And indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of this play is that it is a paean to the ecstasies of mature love, rather than of the teen-age passions so often celebrated.

> … every hour in Rome

The second act opens in Messina, Sicily, at the camp of Sextus Pompeius, who is in conversation with his captains, Menecrates and Menas. Sextus is rather euphoric, confident that his hold on Rome's food supply gives him the trump card and that Octavius Caesar and Lepidus can do nothing without Antony's military ability. As for Mark Antony, Sextus has full confidence in Cleopatra's charms. He says:

> Mark Antony
> In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make
> No wars without doors.

—Act II, scene i, lines 11-13

He is, however, overconfident. Another one of his captains, Varrius, conies with unwelcome news:

> This is most certain, that
> I shall deliver: Mark Antony is every hour in Rome
> Expected.

—Act II, scene i, lines 28-30

There is hope, of course, that upon arrival, Mark Antony will fall to quarreling with Octavius. This is tentatively advanced as a possibility by Menas, but Sextus shakes his head. They may have cause enough to quarrel, but as long as the danger from the sea exists, they will have to make friends. At the end of the short scene, things look as bad for Sextus as, at the start, they had looked good.

> Hark, Ventidius

In Rome, in Lepidus' house, it is now late in 40 b.c. The confrontation between Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony is about to

take place and poor Lepidus is in a sweat lest the two collide destructively. He has undoubtedly done his best to influence Octavius Caesar to be accommodating, and he pleads with Enobarbus to do the same with respect to Mark Antony.

From opposite sides approach the two triumvirs, each with friends, and each pretending to be deep in private discussion so that, for effect, he can seem to be ignoring the other.

Antony speaks first to the general at his side-his thoughts, to all appearances, on military matters in the East:

> // we compose well here, to Parthia.
> Hark, Ventidius.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 15-16a

Here he goes off, apparently, into military talk unheard by the audience and undoubtedly meant to impress Octavius.

Ventidius is Publius Ventidius Bassus, who in early life had been a poor man who made a living renting mules and carriages. He rose to become a general serving under Julius Caesar in Gaul and remained loyal to Julius Caesar during the war with Pompey. After the assassination of the great Julius, Ventidius served Mark Antony and has remained loyal to him since.

> Maecenas; ask Agrippa

As for Octavius Caesar, he is speaking with two men. Of what we can't say, but it is probably politics. Octavius affects carelessness. All we hear him say is:

> / do not know, Maecenas; ask Agrippa.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 16b-17

Maecenas and Agrippa are Octavius Caesar's closest associates, then and afterward. Gaius Cilnius Maecenas was a man of peace. He was several years older than Octavius Caesar and had been a friend of his since the latter was a schoolboy. In later years Maecenas was always left at home to take care of Rome when Octavius Caesar was forced to be away on war or diplomacy. In his eventual retirement,

Maecenas used the wealth he had gathered to support and patronize writers and artists. So earnestly did he do this and so great were those he helped that forever after a patron of the arts has been called "a Maecenas."

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, on the other hand, was the man of war, the good right arm of Octavius Caesar, the general who fought all his master's battles, and who made it possible for Octavius to win military victories. (Why didn't Agrippa win them for himself? Because he was intelligent enough to know that he needed Octavius' brain to direct his arm. In the same way, Mark Antony needed Julius Caesar's brain to direct his arm, but he never really understood that.)

Agrippa was the same age as Octavius Caesar, was with him at school when the news of the assassination of Julius Caesar had arrived, and went with him to Italy. He did not play much of a part in the war against the conspirators, for he was still young. After the Battle of Philippi, however, Agrippa began to shine. It was he, for instance, who led the armies that penned up Fulvia and Lucius Antonius in Perusia and then defeated them.

… time to wrangle …

Softly and eagerly, Lepidus draws the two men together. Stiffly, they sit and confront each other. Each raises the matter of his grievances. Octavius Caesar has the better of this, for he can bring up the war fought against him by Fulvia and Lucius, claiming Antony set them on. Antony objects that the war was against his own policy, and ungallantly places full blame upon his dead wife, saying, in terms that must have raised a wry smile from many a husband in the audience:

> As for my wife,
> I would you had her spirit in such another.
> The third o'the world is yours, which with a snaffle
> You may pace easy, but not such a wife.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 65-68

Nevertheless, argumentation continues till Enobarbus roughly points out the necessity of a compromise, however insincere:

> … if you borrow one another's love
> for the instant, you may, when you hear
> no more words of Pompey, return it again:

you shall have time to wrangle in when
you have nothing else to do.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 107-10

It doesn't make pleasant listening, but it is a fair appraisal of the situation. A practical means of accommodation must be sought.

Admired Octavia…

Agrippa comes up with a suggestion at once. He says to Octavius Caesar:

Thou hast a sister by the mother's side,
Admired Octavia: great Mark Antony
Is now a widower.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 123-25

This sounds as though Agrippa is referring to a half sister, but he isn't. Octavia is a daughter of the same mother as Octavius Caesar as well as of the same father.

Octavius Caesar had two sisters, both older than he. The older one, Octavia Major, was a half sister, by his father's first wife. The second, Octavia Minor, was a full sister and the one to whom Agrippa refers.

She was by no means a young virgin, but was in her mid-twenties by this time (not much younger than Cleopatra) and had been married since her early teens, bearing two daughters and a son. Her husband, Gaius Marcellus, had died the year before, so what was being proposed was the marriage of a widow and a widower.

Mark Antony agrees to the marriage and thus is produced what is hoped will be a permanent bond between the two triumvirs, someone who will be a common love and who will labor to smooth over all irritations. There is a precedent for this, in connection with the First Triumvirate, when Pompey and Julius Caesar were much in the position that Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar are now.

In 58 b.c., when Julius Caesar was leaving for Gaul, he arranged to have Pompey marry Julia, his daughter, who was in her mid-twenties at the time. It turned out to be a love match. Pompey doted

on her and while the marriage lasted, peace was maintained between the two men. In 54 b.c., however, Julia died at the age of only thirty. The strongest link between the two men snapped. The civil war that followed might have been prevented had Julia lived.

It was this precedent which was now being followed. If only Mark Antony could love Octavia as Pompey had loved Julia, all might be well (and better, too, for Octavia was destined to live for thirty years more and was not to die young as Julia had done).

> … my sword 'gainst Pompey

The agreement among the triumvirs was aimed particularly against Sextus Pompeius, and this was rather embarrassing to Mark Antony, who says:

> I did not think to draw my sword 'gainst Pompey,
> For he hath laid strange courtesies and great
> Of late upon me.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 159-61

It was more than that, in fact. The two were making definite overtures toward an alliance. When Antony's mother fled Italy after the Perusine War, Sextus was ostentatiously kind to her. In fact, in a later scene, Sextus reminds Antony of this, saying:

> When Caesar and your brother were at blows,
> Your mother came to Sicily and did find
> Her welcome friendly.

—Act II, scene vi, lines 44-46

Sextus was not doing this, of course, out of sheer goodness of heart. He expected the Perusine War would lead to a greater civil war and he was prepared to choose sides for his own greater benefit. Since Octavius Caesar was closer to himself and the more immediate enemy, he was ready to ally himself with Antony, and this kindness to Antony's mother was a move in that direction.

Indeed, Antony would have welcomed such an alliance, and in 41 b.c. the first steps toward such an understanding had been taken.

Undoubtedly, if it had not been for the terrible Parthian menace, the Sextus-Antony combination would have become reality. As it was, though, Antony had to have peace with Octavius Caesar, and to get that the alliance with Sextus had to be abandoned and even war on Sextus had to be considered.

… Mount Mesena

If the triumvirs were now to turn against Sextus Pompeius, it was none too soon. Sextus had even established strong bases on the shores of Italy itself. Antony asks where he is, and Octavius Caesar answers:

About the Mount Mesena.

—Act II, scene ii, line 166

Mount Mesena is a promontory that encloses a harbor about which the ancient town of Misenum was located. That town, now long gone, was fifteen miles west of Naples. In later years, Agrippa was to construct a strong naval base there, but now it belonged to Sextus.

… the river of Cydnus

The triumvirs leave, so that Mark Antony might meet Octavia and perform whatever perfunctory rites of courtship might seem advisable. Maecenas and Agrippa remain behind with Enobarbus for a little light conversation.

Naturally, this means there is a chance for a little leering in connection with Cleopatra. Maecenas and Agrippa want all the inside information from Enobarbus. Enobarbus is only too glad to comply:

When she first met Mark Antony,
she pursed up his heart, upon the river of Cydnus.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 192-93

That takes us back to the previous year, 41 b.c., when Antony, in the aftermath of Philippi, had taken over the East and was traveling through Asia Minor, gouging money out of the miserable population for the war against Parthia he was planning. Unfortunately for him,

there wasn't much money to be had, squeeze he ever so tightly. Brutus and Cassius had been there the year before (see page I-303) and they had scoured the land clean.

Antony made his headquarters in Tarsus, a city on the southeastern coast of Asia Minor, at the mouth of the Cydnus River. (In Tarsus, a generation later, St. Paul was to be born.) It seemed to Antony that the logical solution to his dilemma was to squeeze Egypt. That land, nominally independent, but actually a Roman puppet, had the greatest concentration of wealth in the Mediterranean world-wealth wrung out of an endlessly fertile river valley and an endlessly patient and hard-working peasant population.

There had been reports that Egypt had helped Brutus and Cassius, and this was very likely, for Egypt was in no position to refuse help to any Roman general who was in her vicinity with an army. Mark Antony understood that well, but what interested him was that this help could be used as an excuse to demand money. He planned to demand a great deal, and for that reason he summoned the Queen of Egypt to come to him in Tarsus and explain her actions. He had briefly seen the Queen in Alexandria in the days when Julius Caesar was there, seven years before, but not since.

Cleopatra, perfectly aware of what Mark Antony intended, and also perfectly aware of his reputation as a woman chaser and of herself as a supreme quarry, decided to come to him in conditions of the greatest possible luxury, with herself beautified to the extreme of art. Plutarch describes the scene well, but Shakespeare improves on it and places it, for greater effect, in the mouth of Enobarbus, the rough soldier, to show that even the least poetic man had to be affected by Cleopatra's unparalleled stage setting of herself.

Enobarbus, in an unbelievable outburst of sheer lyricism, says:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
> O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature: on each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-colored fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,

And what they undid did.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 197-21 la

Agrippa, listening, can only mutter in envy:

O, rare for Antony.

—Act II, scene ii, line 21 1b

Cleopatra's strategy worked to perfection. Antony found himself sitting at the pier on a throne in Roman state-but utterly alone. He was completely upstaged as everyone crowded to watch the approaching barge. He himself was overcome. When Cleopatra invited him on board the barge, he went in what was almost a hypnotic trance, and was her slave from that moment. The Parthians were forgotten until they charged into the Eastern provinces and forced themselves upon Antony's unwilling notice.

Age cannot wither …

Agrippa and Maecenas grow uneasy at the description. The entire accommodation of the triumvirs rests upon the stability of the marriage of Antony and Octavia. Maecenas points out that now Antony must leave her, but Enobarbus answers in an immediate and positive negative; composing in the process the most effective description of complete feminine charm the world of literature has to offer. He says of the possibility of Antony's leaving Cleopatra:

Never; he will not;
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 240-46

And what can the others offer in place of this? Maecenas can only say, rather lamely:

> // beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle
> The heart of Antony, Octavia is
> A blessed lottery to him.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 247-49

> Thy daemon …

Antony pledges himself to Octavia, but on leaving her and Octavius Caesar, he encounters the soothsayer, who has apparently accompanied his train to Italy. Antony asks whose fortune will rise higher, his own or Octavius Caesar's. The soothsayer answers:

> Caesar's.
> Therefore,
> O Antony, stay not by his side.
> Thy daemon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is
> Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
> Where Caesar's is not. But near him thy angel
> Becomes afeared, as being o'erpow'red: therefore
> Make space enough between you.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 18-24

The Greeks came to believe that with each individual was associated a divine spirit through which the influence of the gods could make itself felt. It was when this influence was most strongly felt that a man could attain heights otherwise impossible to him. Where a particular spirit was most continually effective, the man himself would be of unusual power and ability. In some cases, this belief was elaborated to the point where each individual was thought to have two such spirits, one for good and one for evil, the two continually fighting for mastery.

To the Greeks, such a spirit was a "daimon" (meaning "divinity") and in the Latin spelling this became "daemon." To the later Christians these daemons, being of pagan origin, could only be evil, and

therefore we get our present "demon," meaning an evil spirit However, the Greek notion lives on with but a change of name, and. we still speak of guardian angels and we sometimes even envisage an individual as being influenced by his better or worse nature.

The soothsayer is saying that though Octavius Caesar's daemon is inferior to Antony's it can nevertheless win over the latter. In present parlance, we might say that Octavius Caesar plays in luck whenever he encounters Mark Antony. And yet this is hard to accept. It wasn't luck that kept Octavius Caesar on top through all a long life, but ability.

The Latin equivalent, by the way, of the Greek daimon was "genius" (see page I-118).

I'th'East…

The soothsayer, in warning Antony to stay far away from Octavius Caesar, is but telling Antony what he wants to hear. (This is the supreme art of the soothsayer in all ages and places.) Antony therefore says, after the soothsayer leaves:

I will to Egypt:
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I'th'East my pleasure lies.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 39-4la

Eventually, yes, but right now he can't. There are problems he must attend to and until those are resolved, he must remain married to Octavia and must stay out of Egypt

And some of the problems are in the East and won't wait for his personal presence. His general, Ventidius, comes on scene, and Antony says:

O, come, Ventidius,
You must to Parthia. Your commission's ready:
Follow me, and receive't.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 41b-43

… be at Mount

If the Parthians must be dealt with, so must Sextus Pompeius. He was the nearer and the more immediate menace.

The new agreement between the triumvirs and, in particular, Antony's betrayal of his earlier moves toward an alliance had embittered Sextus, and he now escalated his own offensive. In the whiter of 40-39 b.c. Sextus' hand about Rome's throat tightened. Virtually no food entered the capital city and famine threatened. When the triumvirs tried to calm the populace, they were stoned.

They had no choice but to try to come to an agreement with Sextus and to allow him to enter the combine. This would make four men (a quad-rumvirate) in place of three. To discuss this, the triumvirs agreed to come to Misenum, Sextus' stronghold, to confer with him.

Shakespeare skips over the hard winter, passing directly from Antony's marriage to Octavia to the moment when the triumvirs are leaving for Misenum. Lepidus, Maecenas, and Agrippa come on scene in a whirlwind of activity, and Maecenas says:

> We shall
> As I conceive the journey, be at
> Mount Before you, Lepidus.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 5-7

The "Mount" is the Misenum promontory where the meeting with Sextus will take place.

> … his sword Phillipan

Back in Alexandria during that same whiter, Cleopatra spends a moody, restless time. She longs for the period of happiness she had experienced with Antony and says, in reminiscence, to Charmian:

> / laughed him out of patience; and that night
> I laughed him into patience; and next morn,
> Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
> Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
> I wore his sword Philippan.

—Act II, scene v, lines 19-23

Cleopatra may laugh with delight as she remembers, but the picture of Antony drunk by midafternoon (the ninth hour of a twelve-hour day would be about 3 p.m.) and snoring red-faced while wearing women's clothes was undoubtedly the sort of thing Octavian propaganda was scattering all over Rome to the scandal of all good citizens.

It was the fashion of warriors in medieval legend to give names to their swords. The best-known example is that of King Arthur's Excalibur. Mark Antony's sword, Philippan, is named for the Battle of Philippi- Antony's greatest victory.

… a Fury crowned with snakes

Clearly, Cleopatra has not heard the news about Octavia and a frightened Messenger comes in to deliver it.

The Messenger begins by assuring Cleopatra that Antony is well, but he hesitates and the Queen senses that something is wrong. Yet he does not seem sufficiently distraught to be bringing news of death at that. She says to him, concerning his news:

// not well,
Thou shouldst come like a
Fury crowned with snakes,

—Act II, scene v, lines 39-40

The Greeks included in their myths three terrible goddesses, the Erinyes ("angry ones"), whose task it was to pursue and madden those who were guilty of particularly terrible crimes, such as the slaying of close kinsmen. They were depicted and described as so ferocious in appearance that the mere sight was maddening. They carried snakes in their hands, or else their hair was made up of living, writhing snakes. (Perhaps they symbolized the raging of conscience.)

To avoid offending them, the Greeks sometimes spoke of them by the euphemistic term "Eumenides" ("the kindly ones"). Aeschylus wrote a powerful play by that name, dealing with part of the Agamemnon myth. Agamemnon (see page I-89) is killed by his wife Clytemnestra on his return from Troy. To avenge his father, Agamemnon's son, Orestes, kills his mother and is pursued by the

Erinyes in consequence.

The Romans called these fell goddesses "Furiae," from their word for raging madness, and the word is "Furies" in English.

… the feature of Octavia …

The Messenger finally blurts out the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Cleopatra falls into a towering rage and beats the Messenger, shouting horrible imprecations upon him:

> Hence,
> Horrible villain! Or I'll spurn thine eyes
> Like balls before me: I'll unhair thy head,
> Thou shalt be whipped with wire and stewed in brine,
> Smarting in ling'ring pickle.

—Act II, scene v, lines 62-66

The whole scene, properly done, shows Cleopatra in a spitting, fantastic fury, and one can only feel that such rage would make Cleopatra the more attractive to Antony ("vilest things become themselves in her"). Compared with that, the gentle and modest Octavia must have seemed utterly pallid and insipid to Antony, in bed as well as out.

(I cannot resist repeating the story of the two respectable English matrons who were viewing a showing of *Antony and Cleopatra* a century ago, in the reign of Queen Victoria. When this scene passed its shattering course upon the stage, one of the matrons turned to the other and whispered in a most shocked manner: "How different from the home life of our own dear Queen!")

But Cleopatra's rage does not entirely wipe out her shrewdness. She questions the trembling Messenger yet again to make sure there is no possibility of mistake and says to him bitterly when the news is confirmed again and yet again:

> Hadst thou Narcissus in thy face, to me
> Thou wouldst appear most ugly.

—Act II, scene v, lines 96-97

Narcissus is, of course, the lovely youth, irresistible to women, who fell in love with his own reflection (see page I-10).

With that settled, and the Messenger retiring, Cleopatra ponders her next step. She orders a courtier to go after the Messenger and question him further:

> Go to the fellow, good Alexas; bid him
> Report the feature of Octavia; her years,
> Her inclination, let him not leave out
> The color of her hair.

—Act II, scene v, lines 111-14

> Thou dost o'ercount me…

The scene shifts to Misenum, where the triumvirs meet with Sextus. There is an exchange of hostages, threats, harsh language from either side.

Mark Antony tells Sextus that on land the triumvirs "o'ercount" (outnumber) him. Sextus responds sardonically:

> At land indeed
> Thou dost o'ercount me of my father's house:

—Act II, scene vi, lines 26-27

Here the word "o'ercount" is used in an alternate sense, meaning "cheat." The reference is to a house Antony had bought of Pompey the Great once and had then never paid for, since the civil war between Pompey and Julius Caesar intervened. Civil wars always end in enrichment for the victors at the expense of the losers.

> … wheat to Rome

Octavius Caesar, however, coldly keeps his temper, and his steady urging of the real point causes Sextus Pompeius to bring up a suggested compromise. Sextus says:

> You have made me offer
> Of Sicily, Sardinia; and I must

Rid all the sea of pirates; then, to send
Measures of wheat to Rome;

—Act II, scene vi, lines 34-37

In actual fact, the offer was rather more generous than that. Sextus Pompeius already had Sicily, but to it was added not only Sardinia, but Corsica also, and these three large islands half encircle Italy. In addition, since all these were taken from Octavius Caesar's share of the realm, Sextus was to have Greece as well, so that Antony had to pocket a share of the loss.

In return for becoming the fourth man of the group, Sextus would have to take his hand from Rome's throat.

… Apollodorus carried

Sextus Pompeius accepts the compromise and all the parties fall to shaking hands and expressing affection, though Antony, as always, finds he must be the target of a continual lewd curiosity on the part of the others concerning Cleopatra.

Sextus brings up the famous story of how Cleopatra first met Julius Caesar. He says:

And I have heard Apollodorus carried-

—Act II, scene vi, line 68

It had been Apollodorus, a Sicilian Greek, who had delivered the rolled-up carpet containing Cleopatra (possibly nude) to Julius Caesar. Clearly, to bring up tales of Cleopatra's earlier amours could scarcely be calculated to please Antony, and Enobarbus manages to quiet Sextus and head him off.

Thy father, Pompey. ..

Not everyone is satisfied. When the chief characters leave, Menas, one of Sextus' captains, remains behind with Enobarbus. Menas mutters to himself:

Thy father, Pompey, would ne'er have made this treaty.

—Act II, scene vi, lines 82-83

The implication is that Sextus' father, Pompey the Great, would have had too much military and political sense to give up the trump card (starving Rome) for so little, but would have driven a much harder bargain. In this respect, Menas was being more sentimental than accurate, for Pompey the Great had been a poor politician and would undoubtedly have agreed to such a treaty or a worse one.

Later, Menas is frank enough to put the matter even more strongly to Enobarbus:

> For my part, I am sorry it is turned to a drinking.
> Pompey doth this day laugh away his fortune.

—Act II, scene vi, lines 104-5

The accuracy of Menas' judgment would make itself evident soon enough.

> … holy, cold and still. ..

But then Menas too starts probing for information about Cleopatra and is thunderstruck when Enobarbus tells him Antony is married to Octavia. Surely, this can only be a marriage of convenience.

Enobarbus agrees:

> I think so, too. But you shall find the band that seems to tie their friendship together will be the very strangler of their amity:
> Octavia is of a holy, cold and still conversation.

—Act II, scene vi, lines 120-23

Clearly, Enobarbus doesn't think this is the sort of thing that will hold a man like Antony. He says, confidently:

> He will to his Egyptian dish again.

—Act II, scene vi, line 126

… the flow o'th'Nile

The quadrumvirs are on Sextus' galley off Misenum, having a grand time, and are hilarious over their wine. Antony is in his element; he can carry his liquor better than any of them and, as an expert on Egypt, a strange and exotic land, he can regale the others with wonders. He says:

> Thus do they, sir: they take the flow o'th'Nile
> By certain scales i'th'pyramid. They know
> By th'height, the lowness, or the mean, if dearth
> Or foison [plenty] follow. The higher Nilus swells,
> The more it promises…

—Act II, scene vii, lines 17-21

Antony is correct here. The Egyptian priesthood kept a careful watch on the changes in the level of the Nile and through long records had learned to forecast from early variations what the final flood level would be and from that what the likelihood of a particularly poor harvest might be. Such studies had also made the Egyptians aware of the 365-day cycle of the seasons very early in their history and had given them an accurate solar calendar, while other civilizations of the time had struggled with the much more complicated lunar calendars.

The pyramids were not, however, used as scales for the level of the Nile. Throughout history, people have wondered at the uses of the pyramids and have been reluctant to accept the fact that those monstrous piles were merely elaborate tombs. They have been accused of every other purpose but that, and some moderns have considered them the repository of the wisdom of the ages, a means of forecasting the future, and an early method of launching spaceships. But they are tombs, just the same, and nothing more.

Your serpent of Egypt.. .

Lepidus is gloriously drunk; drunk enough to wish to shine as an Egyptian authority himself. He says with enormous gravity:

> Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud
> by the opera tion of your sun; so is your crocodile.

—Act II, scene vii, lines 26-28

This represents the ancient belief in "spontaneous generation," the thought that unwanted or noxious species of plants or animals arise of themselves from dead or decaying matter. (How else explain the prevalence of these species despite human efforts to wipe them out.)

Antony humors the drunken Lepidus by agreeing with him, but it is quite certain that the Egyptians knew that serpents and crocodiles developed from eggs laid by the adult female. The eggs were quite large enough to see.

The situation was less certain with creatures that laid eggs small enough to overlook. It was not until half a century after Shakespeare's death that it was shown that maggots did not arise from dead meat, but from tiny eggs laid on that dead meat by flies. And it wasn't till the mid-nineteenth century that it was shown that microscopic creatures did not arise from dead matter but only from other living microscopic creatures.

Lepidus goes on to deliver a piece of egregious patronization. He says:

> … I have heard the Ptolemies' pyramises
> are very goodly things; without contradiction
> I have heard that.

—Act II, scene vii, lines 35-37

Of course, they were not the Ptolemies' pyramises (or pyramids, as we would say) except in the sense that they were to be found in the land ruled by them. They were built by native Egyptian Pharaohs who ruled more than two thousand years before the first Ptolemy mounted the Egyptian throne. They were as ancient to the Ptolemies as the Ptolemies are to us.

And "goodly things"? Yes indeed. Considering the technology of the tune, the pyramids are the most colossal labors of man the planet has seen, with the possible exception of the Great Wall of China. They

impress us now even in their rains as mere piles of huge granite blocks. When they were new, they had white limestone facings that gleamed smoothly and brightly in the sun and were surrounded by enormous temple complexes.

The Greeks, who notoriously admired no culture but their own, humbly included these non-Greek structures among their Seven Wonders of the World; and of all the Seven Wonders only the pyramids still remain.

Antony cannot resist poking fun at the besotted Lepidus, describing the crocodile in grave but non-informative phrases, ending in the portentous:

> … and the tears of it are wet.

—Act II, scene vii, line 51

Any mention of crocodiles would irresistibly bring tears to mind, for the most famous (but thoroughly untrue) legend concerning the crocodile is that it sheds tears over its prey while swallowing it. Hence the expression "crocodile tears" for hypocritical sorrow.

> … lord of all the world

Menas, meanwhile, has been whispering to Sextus Pompeius and pulling at his sleeve. Sextus, who is enjoying the nonsense at the table, is unwilling to leave and follows Menas only with reluctance.

Once to one side, Menas whispers:

> Wilt thou be lord of all the world?

—Act II, scene vii, line 63

The half-drunken Sextus stares in surprise and Menas is forced to explain:

> These three world-sharers, these competitors,
> Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable;
> And when we are put off, fall to their throats.
> All there is thine.

—Act II, scene vii, lines 72-75

Sextus, sobered by the suggestion, is tempted, but then says, sorrowfully:

> Ah, this thou shouldst have done,
> And not have spoke on't.
> In me 'tis villainy,
> In thee't had been good service.

—Act II, scene vii, lines 75-77

This story is told by Plutarch and yet I wonder if it can be true. It is conceivable that the thought would have occurred to Menas and that

Sextus might have shrunk from the perfidiousness of the deed. But is it conceivable that the triumvirs would have placed themselves in Sextus' grasp without taking precautions against just such an act? If Lepidus were too stupid to foresee the possibility and Antony too careless, I would not believe it of Octavius. He would not step into the lion's jaw without some sort of rod so placed as to hold that jaw firmly open.

However, the story is a good one, true or false, and I would hate to lose it, particularly since it displays so neatly the exact moment when Sextus Pompeius reached and passed the peak of his power.

> … my brave emperor

Octavius Caesar is the only one who is reluctant to drink. He cannot carry his liquor well and he does not enjoy losing his iron control of himself. The rough Enobarbus says to him with some irony:

> Ha, my brave emperor!
> Shall we dance now the
> Egyptian bacchanals
> And celebrate our drink?

—Act II, scene vii, lines 105-7

The word "emperor" is from the Latin *imperator,* meaning "commander." It was a title given a successful general by his troops. It was one of the titles granted Julius Caesar by the Senate. He was not

merely one of many imperators; he was *the* imperator of the Roman armies as a whole- the generalissimo.

Octavius Caesar eventually received the title too, and since control of the army was, at bottom, the secret of the control of the Roman state, his position as "Roman Imperator" was crucial. Through distortion we know the title as "Roman Emperor," and the state became the "Roman Empire."

Enobarbus uses the term "emperor" in its less exalted but more accurate aspect as "commander." Both Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony are referred to now and then throughout the play as "emperor."

> … darting Parthia…

While Sextus Pompeius is being alcoholically neutralized in the West, Parthia is being defeated outright in the East. Leaving Antony in Italy, Ventidius sailed to Asia Minor, where in 39 b.c. he drove the Roman renegade Labienus into the eastern mountains and there defeated and killed him.

The Parthian army, under Pacorus, the son of King Orodes, still occupied Syria and Judea, however. In 38 b.c. Ventidius took his army to Syria and defeated the Parthians in three separate battles (and it was only after this was done that Herod could take his throne in Jerusalem).

In the last of the three victories over Parthia, Pacorus himself was slain. That last battle was fought (according to the story) on the fifteenth anniversary of the fateful day on which Crassus had lost his army at the Battle of Carrhae.

The third act opens, then, a year after the gay celebration at Misenum, with Ventidius returning in triumph from these wars. The dead body of the Parthian prince is being carried along with the army and Ventidius says:

> Now, darting Parthia, art thou struck; and now
> Pleased fortune does of Marcus Crassus' death
> Make me revenger. Bear the King's son's body
> Before our army. Thy Pacorus, Orodes,
> Pays this for Marcus Crassus.

—Act III, scene i, lines 1-5

Parthia is called "darting" because of its reliance on archers in its

battles. The Parthian arrows were their most effective weapon.

… Media, Mesopotamia…

Ventidius' aide, Silius, eagerly urges the general to pursue the enemy, to follow up the victory crushingly, and put an end to the Parthian menace forever. He says:

Spur through Media,
Mesopotamia, and the shelters whither
The routed fly.

—Act III, scene i, lines 7-9

Mesopotamia ("between the rivers") is the name given by the Greeks to the upper portion of the Tigris-Euphrates valley. It was the area within which Crassus had fought and died. The Romans struggled to grasp and hold it for centuries after Crassus' time, and from time to time succeeded. Nearly seven centuries went by before the region passed definitively out of their hands.

Media lay immediately to the east of Mesopotamia. It had been controlled by the Persians, conquered by Alexander the Great, and ruled by the early Seleucids, but at no time, then or later, could Roman force extend itself so far.

I have done enough…

Ventidius resists the temptation to continue the war. He might argue that a limited victory is safest. History is full of generals who could have gained greatly through initial victories and then went on to grasp for too much and to lose all. Adolf Hitler of Germany is only the latest example of this.

There have been exceptions, of course; Alexander the Great being the most notorious. It is hard to say how many generals have been lured to destruction by the specter of Alexander and by the fact that they themselves were not the military genius he was.

Ventidius does not advance such reasonable military grounds. He prefers instead to answer with the wisdom of the practical politician.

O Silius, Silius
I have done enough: a lower place, note well,

May make too great an act. For learn this, Silius,
Better to leave undone, than by our deed
Acquire too high a fame when him we serve's away.

—Act III, scene i, lines 11-15

Perhaps this is true in Antony's case, and if so it is another weakness of his. Since military valor was Antony's great recommendation, he could not endure having his subordinates display too much of it, lest people decide they can do without Antony.

Octavius Caesar had no difficulty of this sort. He was no military man, but he was a political genius. His generals could cover themselves with glory in his name for all he, or anyone, would care-as long as they followed his orders and left the political machinations to him.

… to Athens …

As the Parthian menace is ended, at least temporarily, in victory, so the difficulties with Sextus Pompeius are ended, at least temporarily, in compromise. The quadrumvirs are separating and Mark Antony must go east again to look after his affairs. But still not to Alexandria. He must yet maintain peace with Octavius Caesar and that means maintaining the marriage with Octavia.

In Syria the victorious Ventidius has heard of Antony's move. He says to Silius:

He [Antony] purposeth to Athens…

—Act III, scene i, line 35

Athens was no longer the great warlike power it had been in the time of Alcibiades and Timon (see page I-140) four centuries before. While its fleet had been in being, it was a city to be reckoned with, but its last fleet had been destroyed at the Battle of Amorgos (an island in the Aegean Sea) in 322 b.c.

After that, it was at the mercy of the Macedonians and could at best only wriggle a bit when Macedon was in trouble. In 146 b.c. all of Greece, including Athens, came under direct Roman control as the province of Achaea, and the last vestige of Athenian independence

was gone.

Yet Athens could, and did, make one last gamble. In 88 b.c. the kingdom of Pontus in the northeastern stretches of Asia Minor under its able king, Mithradates VI, attacked Rome. Rome was having internal troubles and was caught flat-footed. The Pontine blitz captured all of Asia Minor. For a wild moment, Greece thought that the Greek-speaking Pontines would lead the way to Greek freedom once more. Athens declared for Pontus and moved into opposition against Rome.

Rome, however, sent its able and ruthless general, Sulla, eastward. He laid siege to Athens, quite without regard to its past glories, and Mithradates of Pontus was utterly unable to send help. In 86 b.c. Athens was taken and sacked and that was the final end. Never again, throughout ancient times, was Athens ever to take any independent political or military action. It settled down to the utter quiet of a university town and for two and a half centuries it was to know complete peace at the price of complete stagnation.

It is to somnolent Athens that Antony now comes and it is there he will stay, with Octavia, for over two years.

This is too long a time for the purposes of the play, of course, since Shakespeare is anxious to show the love affair between Antony and Cleopatra to follow an absolutely irresistible course. He must therefore give the impression that Antony's connection with Octavia is fleeting.

To do this, there is a scene, following that which involves Ventidius, which shows Antony leaving with Octavia for Athens, and then, immediately afterward, one which shows Cleopatra still questioning the Messenger who brought her news of the marriage.

While tremendous events are transpiring in the outside world-a year of campaigning in Parthia and Syria, a year of negotiation in Italy-it is yet the same day in Cleopatra's palace. She is still planning to win Antony back from Octavia, and the Messenger, well knowing what is expected of him, gladly describes Octavia as short, round-faced, with a low forehead and a shambling walk.

> New wars 'gainst Pompey…

Antony's establishment of his capital in Athens is, in itself, an invitation to more trouble. It was part of the compromise agreement with Sextus that the latter be given Greece as one of his provinces. Antony never lived up to that part of the bargain and may have deliberately come to Athens to make sure that Greece remained his.

Once Sextus realized that Antony was not going to keep his part of the treaty, he was naturally infuriated, and once again began his

offensive against Rome's food supply. The pact of Misenum was in ruins before it really got a chance to work.

Shakespeare mentions none of this. When he turns to Antony's house in Athens, he pictures Antony as infuriated at events in Italy and placing all the blame for the renewed trouble on Octavius Caesar. Antony is saying angrily to Octavia, concerning her brother:

> … he hath waged
> New wars 'gainst Pompey; made his will, and read it
> To public ear; Spoke scantly of me …

—Act III, scene iv, lines 3-6

Naturally, Octavius must fight Sextus again; when Sextus begins to stop the grain shipments, Octavius has no choice but to regard it as an invitation to war.

Since Sextus' pretext is the withholding of Greece, which is Antony's act, Octavius Caesar can scarcely keep from suspecting that Antony is behind Sextus; that the two have an understanding. He therefore renews the propaganda offensive against Antony ("spoke scantly of me").

Furthermore, Octavius Caesar shored up his own popularity with the Romans by preparing a will donating money and property to the people in case of his death. He carefully let that will be made public. (Mark Antony once read Julius Caesar's will to the public, see page I-295, and he knows well how powerful a weapon a proper will can be.)

Antony might not have been so angry if Octavius Caesar's struggle with Sextus Pompeius had gone badly for the former. The situation had changed from what it was before, however. When Sextus closed off Rome's life line he found out why Menas had been opposed to the compromise agreement at Misenum. Octavius had used the respite to stock Rome and to fill its storehouses. It would take a long time before it could be choked once more and meanwhile Octavius could strike back. Sextus found that while Antony and Octavius could easily undo their part of the agreement, he could not undo his; he could not withdraw the food he had allowed into Rome.

It was still necessary to fight Sextus, however, even if Rome was not starving. Octavius Caesar twice sent out ships to fight Sextus, and twice Sextus' hardened sea fighters won.

Octavius Caesar therefore set to work in earnest. He placed Agrippa in charge and ordered him to build a fleet. Through the whole of 38 and 37 b.c., Agrippa was hard at work on this project, and

Antony did not like it. The last thing he wanted was an Octavian victory at sea, for that would mean that Octavius Caesar would be free to turn to the East and would have a fleet to do it with.

Antony's impulse, then, is to engage in open hostilities, now, while Sextus can still be his ally and while Octavius is still without real power at sea. (Antony himself can always have the Egyptian fleet at his disposal, in addition to his own ships.)

> Yourself shall go between's. ..

Now conies time for the purpose of the marriage of Octavia to show itself. Octavia pleads for peace between husband and brother and urges Antony to let her serve as peacemaker. Antony agrees, saying:

> … as you requested,
> Yourself shall go between's: the meantime, lady,
> I'll raise the preparation of a war
> Shall stain your brother.

—Act III, scene iv, lines 24-27

Octavia may try to make the peace, then, but if she fails, Antony will make war. Actually, she succeeded. She met her brother and managed to arrange another meeting between Antony and Octavius Caesar at Tarentum in southern Italy in 37 b.c. Peace between them continued.

So much the worse for Antony, however, and the marriage with Octavia proved a disaster for him. The peace she arranged was one in which Antony agreed to, and did, suspend his preparations for war; and in which Octavius Caesar agreed to, but did not, suspend his own preparations for sea mastery. In the interval of peace between the triumvirs, Octavius Caesar continued to build his fleet

> … wars upon Pompey

Shakespeare skips this second reconciliation altogether. Immediately after the scene with Octavia in which she is sent off as mediator, Enobarbus and another of Antony's captains, Eros, rush in to discuss military matters. Eros has news, and says:

Caesar and Lepidus have made wars upon Pompey.

—Act III, scene v, lines 4-5

This sounds like the same wars that Antony has been complaining about in the previous scene, especially since Enobarbus responds by saying:

This is old.

—Act III, scene v, line 6

Actually, it is a new war, begun *after* Octavia has brought about the meeting at Tarentum and the reconciliation.

On July 1, 36 b.c., Agrippa's new fleet set out in three squadrons, Agrippa at the head of one, Octavius of a second, and Lepidus of a third. For two months these ships and those of Sextus met, with victory usually resting with Sextus. At one point, Octavius' squadron was nearly wiped out.

Finally, on September 3, 36 B.C., Sextus was forced to accept battle with Agrippa near the Strait of Messina, which separates Sicily and Italy. This time Sextus was defeated by sea and land, and his power was utterly destroyed. He managed to get away himself and fled eastward, hoping to find safety with Antony.

… denied him rivality …

Antony could now see into what catastrophe Octavia's mediation had led him. Octavius Caesar had beaten Sextus and Antony had lost his chance to make vigorous war against Octavius in combination with Sextus. Making that same war without Sextus and with Octavius equipped now with a victorious navy was another, and worse, matter altogether.

Nor was this the full extent to which matters had turned against Antony. Eros has more news, about Lepidus:

Caesar, having made use of him [Lepidus] in the wars
'gainst Pompey, presently denied him rivality,
would not let him partake in the glory of the action;
and not resting here, accuses him

of letters he had formerly wrote to Pompey;
upon his own appeal, seizes him;
so the poor third is up, till death enlarge his confine.

—Act III, scene v, lines 7-13

What happened was that after Sextus Pompeius was defeated, Octavius Caesar added all the conquered areas (Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and so on) to the provinces controlled by himself. Lepidus, who controlled only Africa, felt that since he had shared in the fighting, he ought to get some of the loot. This Octavius Caesar refused ("would not let him partake in the glory of the action").

Lepidus attempted to use force but this Octavius Caesar scotched at once. He entered Lepidus' camp with a small body of troops, sure that Lepidus' portion of the army would not support their general (probably he had made arrangements with Lepidus' troops in advance). He was right. Lepidus' men deserted him.

Lepidus was therefore demoted from his triumviral status and Africa was taken from him. He was not imprisoned, however, for he was not that dangerous. He was sent back to Rome and was allowed to keep the purely honorary title of Pontifex Maximus ("high priest"), in which role he had many harmless duties to perform. He kept the job for the remaining quarter century of his life and never bothered anyone again.

And threats the throat…

Octavius Caesar is now without a rival in the West. He rules all the provinces and is stronger than ever before. Antony, who had lost his chance for effective military action, can now only rage. Eros describes his actions:

He's walking in the garden-thus, and spurns
The rush that lies before him; cries "Fool Lepidus!"
And threats the throat of that his officer
That murd'red Pompey.

—Act III, scene v, lines 17-20

Sextus Pompeius, fleeing from the lost battle near Sicily, had gone

first to the Aegean island of Lesbos, and then to Asia Minor. There he had been taken by a contingent of Antony's troops, and the officer in charge, assuming him to be an enemy, killed him. That was the end of Sextus Pompeius, just three years after he might have been the lord of all the world by merely cutting a hawser first and then three throats.

The officer who killed Sextus had acted hastily, however. He still had his name and he might have been a most useful pawn to Antony against Octavius. Now he was gone and Antony could only curse the excess zeal of his own loyal officer.

The situation in 36 b.c., then, was this. From a quadrumvirate there had come a diumvirate-two men, Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony.

The disappearance of the other two, Lepidus and Sextus, had resulted in their strength being added entirely to that of Octavius.

In Alexandria.. .

Between the scene just described and the next, there is a historical lapse of two years, which Shakespeare passes over in silence, though they are eventful.

For one thing, Antony, thoroughly disillusioned with the political effect of the marriage with Octavia, left her. The marriage had served Octavius Caesar's purpose only.

In 36 b.c., therefore, he left Athens and returned to Alexandria. He abandoned Octavia and returned to Cleopatra, whom he had not seen in three years. He was forty-seven years old now, and she was thirty-three, and from this point on to the end of their lives, nothing came between them.

Of course, there were still world affairs to deal with. Antony could expect no further agreements with Octavius Caesar. There was going to be war as soon as one or the other felt strong enough to push it.

Antony wanted the strength and to get it he turned and pushed against the Parthians. In a way, this was wasteful, for Antony was turning away from the main enemy (at the moment) and expending energy on a lesser foe. Perhaps we can see his reasoning, though…

Octavius Caesar had won considerable military prestige through his victory over Sextus (even though the credit belonged to Agrippa), and since military prestige was Antony's chief stock in trade he had to balance that gain somehow. The Parthians were still reeling from Ventidius' strokes and might be an easy prey. Then too, once they were beaten, Antony could face westward without having to worry about his rear.

Without provocation, then, Antony opened a campaign against

the Parthians and proceeded to do what Ventidius had refused to do. He pursued the Parthians deep into their own fastnesses.

For his pains, he was trapped in the mountains and was able to escape only with the loss of more than half his army. It was almost as bad a defeat as Crassus had suffered and only the fact that he himself did not die as Crassus had done obscured the fact.

The next year, 35 b.c., he tried to retrieve matters by attacking Armenia, a much weaker adversary than Parthia. Here he won, capturing the King and bringing him back to Alexandria, where he celebrated a mock triumph. (A real triumph would have had to take place in Rome.)

Antony had returned to Alexandria with his military reputation much tarnished as a result of his Eastern adventure, rather than made glistening as he had hoped. Had he come back an easy and glorious victor over Parthia he might well have turned against Octavius at once. As it was, he seems to have decided in favor of settling for half.

He would build an Eastern empire about Egypt as a base and with Alexandria as its capital. He would assume a defensive stance and await events. In doing so, however, he could not help assuming the posture of an Egyptian king.

After all, life with Cleopatra had become a settled thing. She had had twin children-a boy and a girl-soon after he had left her, back in 40 b.c. Now he recognized them as his. They were named Alexander Helios ("the sun") and Cleopatra Selene ("the moon"). He even married Cleopatra with all solemnity, and the marriage was recognized as valid in the provinces controlled by him, even though he was still married to Octavia. (He didn't formally divorce Octavia till 32 b.c.)

It was at this point, too, that he began to hand over Roman territory to Cleopatra, as he had earlier promised.

Octavius, who had been continuing to build his strength in the West and had been preparing public opinion for an offensive against the East, found all this a godsend.

It is here that Shakespeare takes up the story. Immediately after the scene in which the fate of Lepidus and Sextus is described, the scene shifts to Rome, where Octavius Caesar is describing Antony's activity to Maecenas:

> Contemning Rome, he has done all this and more In Alexandria.
> Here's the manner oft: I 'th'marketplace on a tribunal silvered,
> Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold
> Were publicly enthroned; at the feet sat Caesarian,
> whom they call my father's son,

And all the unlawful issue that their lust
Since then hath made between them. Unto her
He gave the stablishment of Egypt; made her
Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia, Absolute queen.

—Act III, scene vi, lines 1-11

Caesarion is, of course, the reputed son of Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar was the great-uncle of Octavius Caesar, actually, but in his will Julius had adopted Octavius as his son, and Octavius therefore always refers to Julius as his father. (A good propaganda point, of course.)

In a way, Antony was restoring to Cleopatra territory that had belonged to the Ptolemies at the peak of their power two centuries before. He also restored Cyrene (which Shakespeare does not mention), which Rome had annexed in 96 b.c.

What's more, their children are also endowed. Octavius Caesar goes on to say:

His sons he there proclaimed the kings of kings:
Great Media, Parthia, and Armenia
He gave to Alexander;
to Ptolemy he assigned Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia.

—Act III, scene vi, lines 12-16

This is not as bad as it sounds. Alexander is Alexander Helios, who at this time (34 b.c.) was six years old. The kingdoms he was given were not really Roman, so that they represented a phantom rule. Ptolemy (that is, Caesarion, who is called Ptolemy XIV) received lands that had once been Ptolemaic.

However, we can be sure that Octavius Caesar made the most of Antony's rash family-centered actions. He made it seem to the Roman populace that Antony was giving away Roman provinces to a powerful foreign queen. What's more, he had made himself king (hated word) and loved Alexandria more than Rome. He held triumphs there and Octavius Caesar found a will which he said was Antony's and which directed that Antony be buried in Alexandria rather than in Rome.

It was easy to make it appear that Antony planned to conquer the West and then not only set himself up as king in Rome but make Cleopatra queen. Accusations such as these, skillfully spread, and made plausible by Antony's own actions, utterly destroyed any credit

Antony might have in the West.

> My lord, Mark Antony

And in upon Octavius Caesar, at this moment, comes Octavia, apparently on her errand of mediation. She says:

> My lord, Mark Antony,
> Hearing that you prepared for war, acquainted
> My grieved ear withal; whereon I begged
> His pardon for return.

—Act III, scene vi, lines 57-60

It would appear that Octavia, who left Mark Antony two scenes before, now arrives in Rome. All the events that took place over three years-the defeat and death of Sextus Pompeius, the demotion of Lepidus, the campaigns of Mark Antony in Parthia and Armenia (to which Octavius makes reference in passing)-are all hastened over in the one intervening scene.

This serves a purpose. In many places in the play, Mark Antony is whitewashed to make him a more sympathetic hero. Here he is made to seem worse than he is so that the love story with Cleopatra can be made more dramatic.

In actual fact, he returned to Cleopatra only after three years, when his marriage to Octavia proved to be politically worthless-or worse. Here in the play, it appears that even while Octavia is on her way to intercede for Antony with her brother, the faithless Antony deserts her.

Octavius asks her where Antony is and when she innocently says that he is in Athens, her brother says:

> No, my most wronged sister,
> Cleopatra Hath nodded him to her.

—Act III, scene vi, lines 65-66

Cleopatra's power over Antony thus seems enormous. The truth of Antony's return would have considerably diminished the glamour of the love affair.

The kings o'th'earth …

Indeed, Octavius goes on to say, Antony is preparing for war:

He hath given his empire
Up to a whore, who now are levying
The kings o'th'earth for war.
He hath assembled Bocchus, the King of Libya;
Archelaus, Of Cappadocia;
Philadelphos, King Of Paphlagonia;
the Thracian king, Adallas;
King Mauchas of Arabia;
King of Pont; Herod of Jewry;
Mithridates, King Of Comagene;
Polemon and Amyntas,
The kings of Mede and Lycaonia;
With a more larger list of scepters

—Act III, scene vi, lines 66-76

This list of kings sounds impressive; the sonorous syllables roll off the tongue. They are at best, however, a set of puppet kinglets, with very little power except for what prestige their names can lend Antony. Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Pont (Pontus), Comagene, and Lycaonia are all regions in Asia Minor. Herod and Mauchas represent small kingdoms in southern Syria, and so on. Indeed, one of the kings listed, Bocchus of Libya, actually fought on Octavius Caesar's side.

Nevertheless, this sort of thing was undoubtedly used by Octavius to rouse the Roman populace with the fear that Antony was turning the whole mysterious East loose upon them.

… denounced against us…

Between this scene and the next, further crucial events take place.

Toward the end of 32 b.c. Octavius finally had the situation exactly where he wanted it. The Senate and the people had grown so exasperated that the former declared war against Cleopatra and the latter supported it avidly.

This was utterly clever. The war was not against Mark Antony, who could be pictured as a Roman general deceived and besotted by a wicked foreign queen; it was against the wicked foreign queen herself.

It was not a civil war; it was a patriotic war against the dangerous kingdom of Egypt. (The fact that Egypt was helpless and harmless and that Cleopatra, minus Mark Antony, had no military power at all, could be ignored. The public knew nothing of that.)

Naturally, Mark Antony had to fight. But he had to fight now against Rome and on the side of the foreigner. Desperately he shifted his armies to Greece and prepared to invade Italy.

Cleopatra, in a decision as foolish as that of Octavius Caesar had been wise, decided to accompany Antony, and together they are now at Actium, a promontory in northwestern Greece.

The next scene, then, opens in Actium, where Cleopatra is raging against Enobarbus, who objects to her presence there. She points out that the war, after all, was declared against her:

> Is't not denounced against us? Why should not we
> Be there in person?

—Act III, scene vii, lines 5-6

But Cleopatra was unintentionally fighting on Octavius Caesar's side in this respect. As a foreign queen, she was no more popular with Antony's soldiers than with the enemy.

> And take in Toryne

Indeed, it is the spirit of Antony's forces that is their weakest point, and Octavius Caesar knows it. Anti-Cleopatra propaganda reaches them and the desertions are numerous. The men won't fight for an Egyptian against Rome. Antony's movements are slowed and made uncertain by the increasingly doubtful loyalty of his men.

Octavius Caesar's general, Agrippa, moves quickly, however. Where it had been Antony's hope to invade Italy, it was Agrippa instead who swept across from that peninsula and landed in Greece. Antony comes in with his general, Canidius, brooding about it:

> Is it not strange, Canidius,
> That from Tarentum and Brundusium
> He could so quickly cut the Ionian sea
> And take in Toryne?

—Act III, scene vii, lines 20-23

Tarentum and Brundusium are ports in the "heel" of Italy. The Ionian Sea is the stretch of water between southern Italy and western Greece. Toryne is a small harbor in northwestern Greece, thirty-five miles up the coast from Actium.

… not well manned

Octavius Caesar's rapid movement (or, rather, Agrippa's, in his name) has cut Antony's line of communication and put him in the peril of running short of supplies. It is to Antony's interest to force a land battle; he has eighty thousand troops to Octavius Caesar's seventy thousand and it is Antony who is the better tactician on land.

On the other hand, it is to Octavius Caesar's best interests to fight a sea battle. He has only four hundred ships to Antony's five hundred, but he still would have the advantage there. Enobarbus points this out to Antony, saying:

> Your ships are not well manned;
> Your mariners are muleters, reapers,
> people Ingrossed by swift impress. In Caesar's fleet
> Are those that often have 'gainst Pompey fought;
> Their ships are yare, yours, heavy…

—Act III, scene vii, lines 34-38

The growing desertions from Antony's standards have left his ships shorthanded, and their crews have had to be fleshed out by the drafting of non-sailors from the surrounding population. And, of course, though you can force a man onto a ship, you cannot force him to be a sailor.

The logical course of action would have been to retreat inland and force Octavius to follow and then fight a land battle. Even an ordinary soldier begs him to take that strategy, saying:

> O noble Emperor, do not fight by sea,
> Trust not to rotten planks.

—Act III, scene vii, lines 61-62

It is Cleopatra, though, who holds out strongly for a sea engagement. We can speculate why. The hardships of an army march might have excluded her and sent her back to Alexandria. A sea victory, on the other hand, would include the Egyptian fleet and entitle her to a share in the glory and the profits. She points out:

> I have sixty sails, Caesar none better.

—Act III, scene vii, line 49

And Antony rejects the advice of his seasoned warriors, decides on the sea battle Cleopatra wants, and loses his last chance.

> With all their sixty…

There follows the sea battle, the Battle of Actium, on September 2, 31 b.c. It is one of the crucial clashes of history.

The battle is, of course, not shown onstage, but Enobarbus supplies the vision of its crucial moment. In agony, he turns away from the sight:

> Naught, naught, all naught! I can behold no longer.
> Th 'Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral,
> With all their sixty, fly…

—Act III, scene x, lines 1-3

When the battle began, Octavius' ships could at first make little impression on Antony's large vessels, and the battle seemed to be a useless one between maneuverability and power. Finally, though, Agrippa's superior seamanship maneuvered Antony's fleet into stretching its line, and Agrippa's ships began to dart through the openings that resulted, making straight for Cleopatra's fleet of sixty that lay in reserve.

At this point, Cleopatra ordered her flagship, the *Antoniad* (named in honor of Antony, of course), to turn and carry her to safety. The remainder of her fleet went with her.

The easy interpretation is that it was simply cowardice. Or perhaps the cowardice wasn't that simple; she felt the battle was lost

and that retreat was necessary. She had to preserve herself from capture (with reason - for with her a captive the war would be lost), and also the treasure chest, which was aboard the ship.

The noble ruin of her magic …

Scarus, another officer, enters in wild passion, for even worse has developed. He tells Enobarbus that, once Cleopatra sailed away:

> The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,
> Claps on his sea wing, and (like a doting mallard)
> Leaving the fight in height, flies after her.

—Act III, scene x, lines 18-20

This is the point at which the world is lost and Antony is forever disgraced. There might be reasons for Cleopatra running away; the only reason for Antony is an impulse of love. This impulse might be understandable, even admirable, to romantics, and surely there is nothing so worth a sigh as to witness some great game tossed away for love.

Yet we must admit that however admirable it may be to ruin oneself for love, however noble to go down to personal death for love, it is not noble to cast away the lives and fortunes of thousands of others for love.

Antony abandoned a fleet that was fighting bravely on his behalf, and in the confusion and disheartenment that followed his flight, many men died who might have lived had he remained. What's more, he abandoned thousands of officers and men on the nearby mainland, who had been prepared to die for him, leaving them only the alternative of useless resistance or ignoble surrender.

We may understand Antony, but we cannot excuse him.

He at Philippi...

Antony well understood his own disgrace. After Actium, he played awhile with the idea (according to Plutarch) of retiring from the world in an agony of misanthropy and self-pity-like Timon of Athens. (It may have been the reading of this passage, indeed, that inspired Shakespeare to try his hand, rather unsuccessfully, at *Timon of Athens* immediately after he had finished *Antony and Cleopatra.)*

Antony cannot bring himself to be a Timon, however, and he must crawl back to the only place that will now receive him-Alexandria. Only Egypt is now his who once ruled half the world, and it will remain his only until Octavius Caesar comes to get him.

Antony broods madly on this same Octavius:

> He at Philippi kept
> His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
> The lean and wrinkled Cassius; and 'twas
> I That the mad Brutus ended. ..

—Act III, scene xi, lines 35-38

It is true. The Battle of Philippi was all Antony and Octavius' portion of the army was defeated. For that matter, Octavius' portion of the fleet was defeated by Sextus, and Octavius was sick during the Battle of Actium, so that the last two victories were all Agrippa.

Yet Octavius, always beaten, was somehow the winner because what he had he kept and what he lost one way he won another. He could use other men well and he had brains and a cool judgment, and that stands head and shoulders over mere "style."

> Fall not a tear…

There is no more room for glory in Antony. Shakespeare, for what is left of the play, intends only to recoup for Antony all the sympathy he has lost by his folly in another way; he will win it all back and more by showing Antony the lover.

With all he has lost, Antony can only reproach Cleopatra sorrowfully. When she says that she did not realize he would follow her, he replies:

> Egypt, thou knew'st too well
> My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings,
> And thou shouldst tow me after.

—Act III, scene xi, lines 56-58

And when she weeps and begs for pardon he says:

Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss;
Even this repays me.

—Act III, scene xi, lines 69-71

What an incredible fool! What an exasperating idiot! But then why do the tears come? And they will continue. Those who can sit through the rest of the play dry-eyed are either seeing an incredibly poor performance or are afflicted with an incredibly impoverished heart.

… her all-disgraced friend

Antony has no choice now but to sue for peace and get what terms he can. He has no kings to send now; they have all deserted him in the aftermath of Actium. He sends his children's tutor to approach Octavius Caesar.

For Cleopatra, he asks that she remain Queen of Egypt only, giving up all the additions Antony has given her. For himself he asks that he remain in Egypt with her or, still less, that he be allowed to remain in Athens as a private citizen. Octavius replies to the Ambassador:

For Antony
I have no ears to his request. The Queen
Of audience nor desire shall fail, so she
From Egypt drive her all-disgraced friend
Or take his life there.

—Act III, scene xii, lines 19-23

Octavius knows his own military deficiencies as well as Antony does. He knows that all his victories are the work of his allies and subordinates and that he himself has contributed nothing in the field. What he desires more than anything else, then, is a glorious triumph in Rome, such as his famous great-uncle had received. It is very likely that for himself he required no such trumperies, but he must surely have realized that his hold on the Roman people would not be complete without some public celebration of victories associated

(however unfairly) with his name.

For the purpose of a triumph, Antony is useless. He is a Roman and could not be dragged at the chariot wheels, and even if he were, that would arouse dangerous sympathies. Nor could he be left alive, even as a private citizen in Athens. How long would he remain a private citizen? How soon would he begin to intrigue to regain what he had lost? For Antony, it had to be death.

Cleopatra, however, must live. She was a foreigner. She was feared to an unimaginable (and undeserved) extent. Her reputation as a charmer and as an insidious schemer against Rome was so impossibly high that the sight of her in chains walking behind Octavius Caesar's triumphant chariot would drive Rome wild with exultation and turn Octavius, truly, into another Julius. Octavius Caesar might have a triumph without Cleopatra; but without her it would be a poor thing and leave his life in that one respect forever incomplete.

Octavius was therefore ready to offer Cleopatra anything, make her any promise, in order to keep her alive.

> … the boy Caesar…

The news of Octavius Caesar's terms is brought to Antony and he says to Cleopatra bitterly:

> To the boy Caesar send this grizzled head,
> And he will fill thy wishes to the brim

—Act III, scene xiii, lines 17-18

The play moves so quickly through space and time that there is no sensation, while watching it, of passing time. Eleven years have passed since the opening scene of the play, if we are thinking of real history. Antony is now about fifty-three years old and his head may well be grizzled. The "boy Caesar" is now thirty-three years old. He is not really venerable, but he is certainly a boy no longer.

> … the getting of a lawful race

Meanwhile, another ambassador, an officer named Thidias, approaches Cleopatra separately. Clearly, if she is to be induced to sacrifice Antony, it can be best done in Antony's absence. Cleopatra is

eager to flatter Octavius into decent terms, both for herself and Antony, and it must be admitted that what historical evidence we have gives us no clear sign that she dreamed of deserting Antony at any time.

However, even while she is fawning on Thidias and giving him her hand to kiss, Antony enters. In the midst of his disgrace and defeat, he finds it only too easy to believe he is being betrayed. He orders Thidias to be whipped and rages at Cleopatra for her immorality and for the other men in her life (surely this is something he knew all about to begin with). He cries out in self-pity:

> Have I my pillow left unpressed in Rome,
> Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
> And by a gem of women, to be abused
> By one that looks on feeders?

—Act III, scene xiii, lines 106-9

To those who know only as much of Antony and Cleopatra as they read in this play it would come as a surprise to know that Antony did indeed beget a lawful race (that is, legitimate children). He had two sons by Fulvia.

The "gem of women" must be a reference to Octavia, but there, too, Shakespeare is bending history. In the play Antony's connection with Octavia seems fleeting, but in actual history, he spent a couple of years with her in Athens and their relationship was long enough and real enough to produce two daughters.

> … the hill of Basan…

Half mad with frustration, Antony taunts Cleopatra with her infidelities to him (in advance yet, for the examples he cites came about before they had met in Tarsus) until he makes himself a cuckold in his own eyes, crying out:

> O, that I were
> Upon the hill of Basan to outroar
> The horned herd!

—Act III, scene xiii, lines 126-28

Basan is the biblical Bashan, an area of pasturage renowned for its fat cows and strong bulls. Thus, the psalmist describes his troubles metaphorically in this way: "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round" (Psalms 22:12). Since bulls are homed, the reference to cuckoldry is clear (see page I-84).

But the reference is biblical. It is conceivable that a cultivated Roman of the times might have come across a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and have read it out of curiosity or interest-but to suppose that the non-intellectual Antony would do so is out of the question.

> … the old ruffian…

Cleopatra manages to calm down Antony at last and bring him to what senses remain in him.

Octavius Caesar's army is now just outside Alexandria and Antony decides to meet him in one last land fight. In fact, he even-as a gesture-offers to meet Octavius in single combat.

Octavius meets this challenge with characteristic contempt. He says to Maecenas:

> My messenger
> He hath whipped with rods; dares me to personal combat.
> Caesar to Antony: let the old ruffian know I have many
> other ways to die; meantime Laugh at his challenge.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 2-6

Actually, though one could not guess it from the play, eleven months have passed since the Battle of Actium. Octavius Caesar did not swoop down on Egypt at once. That could wait, for Antony and Cleopatra were helplessly penned up there.

Octavius first founded the city of Nicopolis ("City of Victory") near the site of the battle. Then he had to spend time reorganizing the affairs of the Eastern provinces that had been Antony's domain and were now his. (Egypt, be it remembered, had never, till then, been a Roman province, but was in theory an independent kingdom.)

Then he had to return to Rome to take care of pressing matters there. It was only in July 30 b.c. that he could sail his army to Egypt itself. By that tune Cleopatra was thirty-nine.

Antony and Cleopatra had spent the eleven-month respite in

luxury as though they knew their time was limited and were determined to make the most of what was left. But now Octavius Caesar had come and the time for the final battle was at hand.

… the god Hercules…

The eve of the last battle is a strange one. The soldiers hear mysterious music in the air and underground, moving away into the distance. One soldier guesses at the meaning:

'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved,
Now leaves him.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 15-16

This eerie tale is told by Plutarch and is the kind of legend that arises after the fact.

It is, of course, rather late in the day for Hercules to leave poor Antony. Hercules had clearly abandoned him on the eve of Actium.

… send his treasure after.. .

Nor is it only Hercules that abandons Antony. The common soldier who had advised a land battle at Actium now meets Antony again. If that land battle had been fought, he says:

The kings that have revolted, and the soldier
That has this morning left thee, would have still
Followed thy heels.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 4-6

Thus it is that Antony discovers that the rough and faithful Enobarbus has at last deserted him and gone over to Octavius Caesar's camp. But Antony, in adversity, always rises to heights of strength and nobility he cannot possibly reach in prosperity. He realizes that not Enobarbus' wickedness but his own follies have driven the soldier away. He is thinking perhaps that after his own desertion at Actium, no soldier owes him loyalty, and he says:

O, my fortunes have
Corrupted honest men!

—Act IV, scene v, lines 16-17

And, having learned that Enobarbus has crept away so secretly as to have been unable to take with him his personal belongings and the money he has earned in the course of his labors, Antony says to his aide-de-camp:

Go, Eros, send his treasure after; do it,
Detain no jot, I charge thee.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 12-13

… alone the villain…

Shakespeare found the tale of this princely gesture in Plutarch and it is believable in Antony. He was lost, anyway, and it was the kind of quixotic gesture a man noble by fits would make. If it had been Octavius Caesar, we might suppose it to have been done out of a desire to punish the deserter, for punishment it most certainly turns out to be.

Enobarbus is already suffering over his betrayal, and realizes that the tardy converts to Octavius Caesar's cause are not truly trusted and are certainly not honored, but live in a kind of contemptible twilight. In the midst of his misgivings, he hears his property has been sent after him. Stupefied, he bursts out in agony:

/ am alone the villain of the earth,
And feel I am so most.

—Act IV, scene vi, lines 30-34

They are beaten…

In the last battle, despite everything, the advantage falls to Antony once more. He and his soldiers fight like madmen and his

officer, Eros, rushes in to say:

> They are beaten, sir, and our advantage serves
> For a fair victory.

—Act IV, scene vii, lines 11-12

But, alas, this is one of Shakespeare's few inventions of the play. There was no victory at this point. There wasn't even a true battle. Antony's remnant of an army gave in almost at once and Antony was penned up in Alexandria.

What Shakespeare wanted was one last unexpected uplift; one last illusion; one last hope of escape from the doom the lovers had madly woven about themselves; perhaps one sight of might-have-been for the land battle at Actium that had never come.

> O, Antony

The victory serves also to add the last unbearable pang to Enobarbus' agony. Had those faithful to Antony had the courage and will to fight and win while he himself had slunk away, a coward traitor? He staggers into the night, crying:

> O, Antony,
> Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
> Forgive me in thine own particular,
> But let the world rank me in register
> A master-leaver and a fugitive.
> O, Antony! O, Antony!

—Act IV, scene ix, lines 18-23

And so, asking forgiveness from Antony alone, and content to have all the world besides scorn him, he dies. Yet he does not have his wish, for with Shakespeare's deathless music pleading his case, who can scorn him? No one!

Again, Shakespeare follows his sources in having Enobarbus die of heartbreak. From a historical standpoint, it is hard to believe in such a death, but here, as in so many cases, it is far better to romanticize with Shakespeare than be flat with history.

There is a sequel to the story that Shakespeare doesn't hint at, but one that should be mentioned if only to soften a little our regret at Enobarbus' fate.

Enobarbus had a son, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, who in later years served Octavius Caesar and who did well. This Lucius eventually married Antonia, who was Mark Antony's elder daughter by Octavia. They had a son, Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus (Enobarbus' grandson and namesake), who thus had both Enobarbus and Antony for grandfathers.

The younger Ahenobarbus married Agrippina, a great-granddaughter of Octavius Caesar and a great-granddaughter of Livia, the wife of Octavius Caesar, by her earlier marriage. Their son, the great-grandson of Antony and the great-grandson of Enobarbus, as well as the great-great-grandson of both Livia and Octavius Caesar himself, became the fifth Roman emperor in a.d. 54, eighty-four years after Enobarbus' death.

Could Enobarbus have suspected in his wildest dreams that a descendant of his would one day rule all Rome?

It is rather a shame to spoil the story by identifying this fifth emperor, the last of the house which Julius Caesar first brought to mastery in Rome, and who combined in himself the heritage of Octavius Caesar, his wife Livia, his sister Octavia, his enemy Antony, and his defected enemy, Enobarbus, but I must. The emperor was the infamous Nero, whose real name was Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus.

All is lost

And now Shakespeare returns to history and lets Antony's forces betray him. Antony enters, shouting:

> All is lost!
> This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me:
> My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder
> They cast their caps up and carouse together
> Like friends long lost. Triple-turned whore!
> 'Tis thou Hast sold me to this novice.. .

—Act IV, scene xii, lines 9-14

Antony is almost mad in his frustration, and when Cleopatra enters, he yells at her those words most designed to hurt her, exulting in the possibility that she may be taken by Octavius Caesar to grace

his triumph.

> The shirt of Nessus …

Cleopatra rushes off, appalled by Antony's fury, and in deadly fear that he may even forestall Octavius Caesar's victory and kill her with his own hands. This possibility is made clear to the audience by Antony's rage-filled mythological allusion, when he cries:

> The shirt of Nessus is upon me; teach me,
> Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
> Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o'th'moon.

—Act IV, scene xii, lines 43-45

Alcides is, of course, Hercules (see page I-70). Hercules was the personification of blind strength, and since such strength can often be misapplied, several tales were told of what Hercules did in his mad rages. In one of these madnesses, he killed six of his own children and it was in penance for this that he was condemned to perform his twelve labors. Such madness Antony feels to be coming over himself.

The specific reference is to an event late in Hercules' life, when he took his last wife, Deianeira. At one time the two were crossing a river in flood. Nessus, a centaur (half man, half horse), offered to carry Deianeira across while Hercules swam. The arrangement was accepted, but, coming to the other side, the centaur galloped off with Deianeira and tried to rape her. The angry Hercules shot down the centaur with one of those arrows which had been dipped in the deadly poison of the Hydra's (see page I-237) blood.

As Nessus lay dying, he told Deianeira that if she saved some of his blood and placed it on Hercules' shirt, it would be an infallible way of assuring his fidelity. While he wore the shirt, he would love only her. Deianeira believed him.

Eventually, when Hercules began to wander, Deianeira remembered Nessus' advice and sent him a bloodstained shirt by Lichas, one of his attendants.

Hercules put it on (not noticing the blood, apparently) and at once the poison it carried from his own arrow began to burn into him with agonizing pain. He writhed in anguish, but the shirt had grown to his body and could not be removed. He seized Lichas as madness came over him, throwing him high into the air with all the might of his superhuman muscles. Lichas fell into the sea and was changed into

a rock, while Hercules himself died in torture. Deianeira, at hearing the news, killed herself.

It was this "shirt of Nessus" that Antony felt himself to be wearing, and a like agony that he felt within himself. In his grief and rage he is ready to kill Cleopatra:

> The witch shall die:
> To the young Roman boy she hath sold me …

—Act IV, scene xii, lines 47-48

The "young Roman boy" is now thirty-three, remember.

> … the boar of Thessaly

Cleopatra is in the last extreme of panic. She knows that it is because of her that Antony has frittered away everything, and there is no doubt in her mind that he intends to kill her. She cries out to her ladies:

> O, he's more mad
> Than Telamon for his shield; the boar
> of Thessaly Was never so embossed.

—Act IV, scene xiii, lines 1-3

Cleopatra matches Antony's example of mythological rage and madness (Hercules) with two examples of her own; making, as it happens, a mistake in each case.

It was not Telamon, but Telamon's son, Ajax (see page I-110), that went mad. After the death of Achilles under the walls of Troy, the question arose as to who was to inherit his divinely wrought armor, and the choice narrowed to the mighty-thewed Ajax and the shrewd and cunning Ulysses (see page I-92). We might suppose the Greeks reasoned that Ajax's muscles could kill only one Trojan at a time but that Ulysses' shrewd policy might yet win the war altogether. (And it did, for it was Ulysses who finally conceived the stratagem of the wooden horse-see page I-188.) So the armor went to Ulysses.

Now, finally, Ajax's long-suffering and unsubtle heart broke and he went mad. He planned to revenge himself on the leaders of the

Greek army, and mistaking a herd of sheep for men, he lunged among them with his sword, screaming imprecations. When he recovered from his rage and found himself surrounded by slaughtered beasts, he realized that he had but made himself ridiculous-so he killed himself.

As for the boar of Thessaly who was so embossed (that is, foaming at the mouth with fury), he was a huge mad creature sent to Calydon to ravage the countryside because the Calydonians had neglected to make proper sacrifices to Diana (Artemis). But Calydon was in Aetolia, not Thessaly.

> The sevenfold shield.. .

Cleopatra feels that the only way of saving her life (and this is straight from Plutarch and is not Shakespeare's dramatic invention) is to send news to Antony that she has died with his name upon her lips. Her feeling is that he would then realize she had not betrayed him and she could safely come back to life so that together they might plan their next move.

But she miscalculated the effect of the news on Antony. In the midst of his raving for her death, the news is brought to him that she is already dead, and instantly his rage vanishes.

The full swell of the orchestra ceases sharply and leaves behind the soft wail of one lonely flute, as Mark Antony turns to his aide and says:

> Unarm, Eros. The long days task is done,
> And we must sleep.

—Act IV, scene xiv, lines 35-36

He scorns the armor he is removing, for it cannot protect him from this new blow. He says:

> The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep
> The battery from my heart.

—Act IV, scene xiv, lines 38-39

Again a reference to Ajax; this time to his famous shield, which Homer describes in connection with the duel of that hero with Hector.

It was a huge shield, covering Ajax from neck to ankles, made of seven separate layers of tough oxhide and covered with bronze. It was so heavy that none but Ajax (or Achilles) could wield it, and so strong that a spear driven by the full fury of Hector's arm could penetrate but six of the layers.

… souls do couch on flowers…

Antony plans suicide and dreams that in death he and Cleopatra will be reunited. He imagines them in Elysium (see page I-13) and says:

… stay for me.
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.

—Act IV, scene xiv, lines 50-54

I am dying, Egypt…

But even Antony's last act betrays him. He cannot have himself killed by his men. Eros kills himself rather than Antony. (That is in Plutarch and Shakespeare is not forced to make it up.) In desperation, Antony falls on his own sword, but does not aim correctly. He is badly wounded and dying, but still alive.

Now comes a messenger from Cleopatra, who, too late, fears the effect of the news of her death. She has locked herself, for safety, in her own tomb. (It was the custom of Egyptian monarchs to build, while alive, their own resting places after death-the pyramids having represented that custom at its most incredibly extreme. Shakespeare refers to Cleopatra's tomb as the "monument," and, of course, it served that purpose too.)

The dying Antony is brought to the tomb, carried on the shoulders of his guard. Cleopatra watches from a high window. She dares not open the doors to the tomb, for once Antony is dead, it seems entirely reasonable that his soldiers will kill her. From the courtyard, Antony, never more in love, calls out:

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only

I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.

—Act IV, scene xv, lines 18-21

Cleopatra and her women draw Antony up to the window on a stretcher. (Plutarch describes the effort it took to do so and how Cleopatra, with the strength of despair, managed.) The lovers are together one last moment and the kiss that Antony asked for is given.

And then he dies, fourteen years after the death of Julius Caesar had embarked him on that wild course during which he had held the world in his hands, and had thrown it away.

… eternal in our triumph

The news of Antony's death reaches Octavius Caesar, who bursts into tears.

Could Octavius, that cold politician, that efficient machine who never made a serious mistake, be so soft at the death of the man he had been fully determined to execute? Or was his sorrow a calculated device to blunt the sympathy of men for Antony?

It is clearly Shakespeare's intent to argue the latter, for as Octavius Caesar's speech grows more and more emotional and eloquent, an Egyptian arrives with a message from Cleopatra and Octavius turns off the flow at once and is all business, saying:

But I will tell you at some meeter season.
The business of this man looks out of him;
We'll hear him what he says.

—Act V, scene i, lines 48-51

Octavius Caesar learns that Cleopatra is still locked in her tomb and is sending to him to find out his terms. He is all sharpness now. His victory has been partially blunted by Antony's suicide, for in Roman terms a suicide under such conditions is a noble action and gains the dead man sympathy (which Octavius had to neutralize as far as possible by ostentatious tears and praise-as Antony had done over the corpse of Brutus, see page 1-315).

But there still remains Cleopatra. It is now in the highest degree necessary to keep her from killing herself. He sends her comforting words by her messenger and then sends Proculeius, one of his own men, to her, telling him:

> … give her what comforts
> The quality of her passion shall require,
> Lest, in her greatness, by some mortal stroke
> She do defeat us. For her life in Rome
> Would be eternal in our triumph.

—Act V, scene i, lines 62-66

> … conquered Egypt…

Proculeius reaches Cleopatra and asks her terms for surrender. She states them, saying:

> .. .if he [Octavius] please
> To give me conquered Egypt for my son,
> He gives me so much of mine own as I
> Will kneel to him with thanks.

-Act V, scene ii, lines 18-21

She is offering to abdicate and asking that her son be recognized as King of Egypt so that the land will remain independent to some extent. She doesn't say which son, but presumably she means Caesarion, who is now seventeen years old and who is coruler with her as Ptolemy XIV.

Naturally, this is an entirely unacceptable request from Octavius Caesar's standpoint. With the son of Cleopatra on the throne, or even alive as a private citizen, he would always be the focus for revolts. What Octavius Caesar intended, and what he did, was to annex Egypt, not only as a Roman province, but as a personal possession with he himself getting all the revenues, as though he were a king of Egypt.

This meant potential rivals would have to be put out of the way. Caesar-ion was too dangerous to be left alive, and in the aftermath of Octavius Caesar's victory, he was executed. The same fate was waiting for Antony's older son by Fulvia. Two of the children of Antony and Cleopatra were allowed to live and were brought up by none other

than Octavia, who, in this, showed herself nobly forgiving. (It is also possible that Octavia had loved Antony and had felt a certain guilt in having been used by her brother as one more weapon with which to defeat him.)

The daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Cleopatra Selene, was eventually married to Juba of Numidia, the son of a king (also named Juba) who had died at the Battle of Thapsus (see page I-281) fighting against Julius Caesar. The younger Juba had been given a complete Roman education and in 25 b.c. was made King of Mauretania, located where the present-day Morocco is to be found. Thus a younger Cleopatra became an African queen.

The two had a son-the grandson of Antony and Cleopatra-who was called Ptolemy of Mauretania. He was the very last of the Ptolemies. He reigned quietly till a.d. 40, when he was called to Rome and there, seventy years after the suicide of Mark Antony, was put to death by the mad emperor Caligula, for no better reason than that he had accumulated wealth which the Emperor felt he would like to confiscate for his own use.

But all that lay in the future. At the moment, Cleopatra is asking that Egypt be left to be ruled by her son, and Proculeius answers in soft words, for he knows that Roman soldiers are quietly surrounding the tomb and forcing the doors.

Suddenly Cleopatra is seized from behind and the dagger she attempts to draw is wrested from her. It is clear that she will not be allowed to commit suicide. All means for doing so will be taken from her and she will be watched. All she has left, it seems, are her memories:

> I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony.
> O, such another sleep, that I might see
> But such another man.
>
> —Act V, scene ii, lines 76-78

> He words me…

Octavius himself arrives; smooth, gentle, and gracious. In Plutarch, Cleopatra is described as being far from herself; her hair torn, her face scratched and puffy. Still, she is Cleopatra; pushing forty perhaps, but the creature of charm who could have her will of the greatest of Romans. Why not Octavius Caesar as well?

But Octavius is immune. He is cold and unimpassioned. He

pushes aside the list of possessions she hands him and is ummoved when Cleopatra's secretary, currying the favor of the victor, reveals that Cleopatra, even at this great crisis, has thoughtfully listed less than half her assets. (After all, why should this disturb Octavius? He plans to take all Egypt.)

His last words to her are:

> Feed and sleep:
> Our care and pity is so much upon you
> That we remain your friend; and so adieu.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 187-89

When she tries to prostrate herself before him, he will not allow it. But as soon as he leaves, Cleopatra looks after him bitterly and says:

> He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not
> Be noble to myself!

—Act V, scene ii, lines 191-92

She knows certainly that what Octavius has in mind for her is his own triumph. If she had any doubts in the matter, one of Octavius' officers, Cornelius Dolabella (according to Plutarch, and followed in this by Shakespeare), sends her secret information to this effect.

Sadly, Cleopatra pictures to her ladies the triumph in such a way as to make it plain to the audience (not Roman, and therefore not necessarily understanding the virtues of suicide) that death is preferable. As a climax she describes the comic plays that will be written about them:

> Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and 1 shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I'th'posture of a whore.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 218-21

It is almost as though Shakespeare is preening himself here. After all, he has written the play and in it, Antony is far more than a mere drunkard and Cleopatra far more than a mere whore. The magic of Shakespeare converts them at last to ideal lovers and it is as such, thanks to him, that they will live forever.

> … the pretty worm of Nilus.. .

Now must come the suicide.

Actually, the method used is a mystery. The Roman guards left behind by Octavius Caesar were surely impressed with the fact that Cleopatra must be kept alive. Cleopatra must therefore have succeeded in hiding something small and unnoticeable, prepared for such a contingency.

Her body was found virtually unmarked except for what seemed to be a puncture or two on her arm. It had to be poison then, but administered how? Was it the puncture of a poisoned needle which she had kept hidden in her hair? Or was it a poison snake?

The poison snake is much more unlikely and is, indeed, rather implausible, but it is exceedingly dramatic and, whether true or not, is accepted by all who have ever heard of Cleopatra. If they have heard only one thing of her, it is her method of suicide by snake.

She prepares for that suicide as though she were meeting her lover once again, and indeed, she expects to, in Elysium. She demands that she be dressed in her most splendid gowns as on that occasion when she met Antony for the first time:

> Show me, my women, like a queen: go fetch
> My best attires. I am again for Cydnus,
> To meet Mark Antony.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 227-29

A peasant is brought in now with the gift of a basket of figs for her. It is this, partly, which makes the tale of the poison snake implausible. Would anyone have been allowed in to see her under the circumstances? Would he have failed to undergo a search if he were passed through? Is it conceivable that the basket of figs would have been unexamined?

Yet that is the tale that Plutarch reports as one possibility. He also talks of poisoned needles and poisoned razors.

Cleopatra asks the peasant:

Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there,
That kills and pains not?

—Act V, scene ii, lines 243-44

He does! The "pretty worm" is the asp, or Egyptian cobra, whose venom works quickly and painlessly. What's more, the creature was worshiped, as so many dangerous animals were in Egypt, and the coiled head of the cobra was worn on the headdress of the Pharaohs. A death by cobra bite was a royal death; it was rather like being bitten by a god.

Cleopatra is now ready. She says to her ladies in waiting:

Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me. Now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick: methinks I hear
Antony call: I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act. I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come:

—Act V, scene ii, lines 280-87

And yet not all is pure love of Antony. There is some relish in feeling that she is depriving Octavius of his final victory. For as the asp is biting her, she says to it:

O couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass
Unpolicied!

—Act V, scene ii, lines 306-8

It is well done…

Cleopatra dies. Her lady in waiting Iras is already dead of heartbreak, and Charmian (whom early in the play the soothsayer had

predicted would outlive her mistress) is applying the asp to her own arm. In come the Roman soldiers, but too late.

Gaping at the dead Cleopatra, they get the significance of it at once. One of the soldiers cries:

> … All's not well: Caesar's beguiled.

—Act V, scene ii, line 323

Then, when the same soldier angrily asks Charmian whether this sort of thing was well done, she answers proudly, just before dying:

> It is well done, and fitting for a princess
> Descended of so many royal kings.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 326-27

> … an aspic's trail…

Octavius arrives to witness the defeat of what he planned as his crowning victory. They puzzle out the manner of her suicide. There is a swelling and a spot of blood on Cleopatra's breast and the soldier who had questioned Charmian now says:

> This is an aspic's trail; and these fig leaves
> Have slime upon them…

—Act V, scene ii, lines 350-51

It is an old superstition that snakes are slimy. They are not. Some snake-like sea creatures are slimy-lampreys, eels, salamanders. Snakes, however, are perfectly dry to the touch.

> … another Antony

It falls to the cold Octavius to give Cleopatra her final epitaph. Even he is moved as he gazes at her dead body as she lies there-Cleopatra still. He says:

… she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another
Antony In her strong toil of grace.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 345-47

Nor is he vindictive. He says:

Take up her bed,
And bear her women from the monument.
She shall be buried by her Antony.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 355-57

… then to Rome

And now the world calls the one survivor and victor of all the turbulent events of the play. He says:

Our army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,
And then to Rome.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 362-64

The civil wars that have lasted fifty years are over. The next year, 29 b.c., Octavius Caesar ordered the closing of the temple of Janus, indicating that Rome was at peace, the first time that had happened in over two hundred years. Then, in 27 b.c., he accepted the title of Augustus, by which he is best known to history.

From 27 b.c. Augustus reigned for forty-one years, establishing a new kind of government, the Roman Empire, and serving as its first and by all odds the greatest of its emperors. So firm was the government he established and so honored was it in the memory of man that though the last Roman Emperor in Italy abdicated in a.d 476, another ruler calling himself Roman Emperor continued to reign in Constantinople. The Constantinopolitan line, which used the title of Roman Emperor to the end, endured till 1453, and even after it was gone there was still a Roman Emperor in Vienna-a line that continued

till 1806.

And even after that was gone there were emperors. In the German language, these were called Kaisers and in the Slavic languages tsars-both distortions of Caesar, the family name of Julius and Octavius. The last Russian tsar resigned his throne in 1917, the last German Kaiser in 1918, the last Bulgarian tsar in 1946.

It is interesting that 1946 is exactly two thousand years after 44 b.c., the year in which Julius Caesar was assassinated. For that length of time not one year passed in which somewhere in the world there wasn't someone calling himself by a form of "Caesar" as title (as all the Roman emperors did).

13. The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus

Of the four plays and one narrative history which are set in Rome, *Titus Andronicus* is the only one that does not deal with accepted Roman history or legend. It is utter fiction. Not one character in it, not one event, is to be found in history.

What's more, *Titus Andronicus* is the bloodiest and most gruesome of Shakespeare's plays, and the one in which the horror seems present entirely for the sake of horror.

Indeed, *Titus Andronicus* is so unpleasant a play that most critics would be delighted to be able to believe it was not written by Shakespeare. They cannot do so, however. There are contemporary references to *Titus Andronicus* as a Shakespearean tragedy, which also place the time of its writing at about 1593. It is an early play but by no means the earliest, and Shakespeare could surely have done better than *Titus Andronicus* by this time.

Apparently, what Shakespeare was doing was experimenting with Sene-can tragedy (see page I-270). These blood-and-thunder plays written about horrible crimes and horrible revenges were immensely popular in Elizabethan tunes. Thomas Kyd, for instance, had written such a drama, *The Spanish Tragedy,* shortly before Shakespeare had begun his dramatic career, and had scored an immense success.

Shakespeare had no objection to success and was perfectly willing to adjust himself to popular taste. In *Titus Andronicus* he therefore gave full vent to blood, cruelty, disaster, and revenge. Indeed, he went so far that one can almost wonder if he weren't deliberately pushing matters to the limit in order to express his disgust of the whole genre.

> … the imperial diadem of Rome

The play opens in Rome, with the Romans in the process of selecting a new Emperor.

The two candidates for the throne are the two sons of the old Emperor; Saturninus, the older, and Bassianus, the younger. Both are clamoring for acceptance by the people. Saturninus stresses the fact that he is the elder:

> / am his first-born son that was the last
> That ware the imperial diadem of Rome;
> Then let my father's honors live in me.

—Act I, scene i, lines 5-7

The younger son, with a lesser claim, is forced to be more emotional. He begins:

> // ever Bassianus, Caesar's son,
> Were gracious in the eyes of royal Rome,

—Act I, scene i, lines 10-11

Who the Emperor was who was "the last that ware the imperial diadem of Rome" is never stated.

To be sure, Bassianus calls himself "Caesar's son," but this is not a reference to Julius Caesar (see page I-253) or Octavius Caesar (see page I-292). All Roman emperors were called "Caesar," for that was one of the royal titles (see page I-390).

In fact, the identity of the just-dead Roman Emperor couldn't possibly be determined, for the entire play is a weird amalgamation of different periods of Roman history. There is a panoply of senators, tribunes, and common Romans on stage, as though it were of the stern period of the Roman Republic, as in *Coriolanus.* On the other hand, we have emperors, of a later period, and barbarian invaders of a still later period.

The names of the sons have some points of interest. The only important Saturninus in real Roman history was a radical politician who was killed about 100 b.c. in the years when the Roman Republic began the public disorders that were eventually to kill it. As for Bassianus, the name of the younger son, that is to be found among the names of three of the emperors of the dynasty of Septimius Severus, who ruled in the early third century.

The elder son of Septimius Severus was Bassianus. He succeeded on his father's death in 211. Bassianus did not rule under that name but was universally called "Caracalla," a nickname derived from the long cloak *(caracalla)* he habitually wore.

Bassianus had a younger brother, Geta, who was supposed to have inherited the emperorship along with him. The two brothers were deadly enemies, however, and by 212 Bassianus had killed Geta under particularly cruel circumstances.

Thus, the competition between Saturninus and Bassianus in the play seems to reflect, faintly, the competition between Bassianus and Geta in history.

In one respect, in fact, the time of Caracalla might be thought to

be the latest period in which the play could be set, for it treats of a thoroughly pagan Rome. There is no sign of Christianity in the play, yet after Cara-calla's time, the growth of Christianity would have made the new religion impossible to ignore.

There are, however, other aspects of the play that make the time of Caracalla far too early.

As it happens, there is in existence a tale called *The Tragical History of Titus Andronicus,* of which the only known copy was published about a century and a half after Shakespeare's play was written. That copy may, however, be a reprint and the original may have appeared early enough to serve as Shakespeare's source.

In the booklet the time is set in the reign of Theodosius, by whom is probably meant the most famous Emperor of that name, Theodosius I. He ruled from 379 to 395, nearly two centuries after Caracalla.

When Theodosius died, he left behind two sons, but these, unlike the sons of Septimius Severus (or those in the play), did not compete for the throne. They inherited the co-emperorship in peace, with the elder, Arcadius, ruling the Eastern half from Constantinople, and the younger, Honorius, ruling the Western half from Rome.

To be sure, by the time Theodosius was Emperor, Rome was thoroughly Christian and Theodosius himself was particularly pious in this respect, so that the paganism of the play would then become an anachronism. (On the other hand, considering the horrible events that take place in it, the existence of Christianity would be embarrassing.)

> … surnamed Pius

It turns out that there are factions in Rome who want neither son of the old Emperor, but who turn instead to a valiant general. The announcement is made by Marcus Andronicus the tribune, who happens to be a brother of that general. He says:

> Know that the people of Rome, for whom we stand
> A special party, have by common voice,
> Chosen Andronicus, surnamed Pius
> For many good and great deserts to Rome.

—Act I, scene i, lines 20-23

Andronicus is the Titus Andronicus of the tide. The surname of "Pius" was sometimes used in Roman history to indicate a man who was devout and who honored his parents and his gods. The most famous case of such a usage is that of Emperor Antoninus Pius, who

reigned from 138 to 161 and whose reign saw the Roman Empire at its most peaceful.

> … the barbarous Goths

The special claim of Titus Andronicus to the gratitude of Rome lay in the wars he had been fighting. Marcus says:

> He by the senate is accited home
> From weary wars against the barbarous Goths.

—Act I, scene i, lines 27-28

Furthermore, the war has been going on a long time, as Marcus further explains:

> Ten years are spent since first he undertook
> This cause of Rome, and chastised with arms
> Our enemies' pride:

—Act I, scene i, lines 31-33

The Goths were a group of Germanic tribes who began raiding the Roman Empire about the middle of the third century, not long after the time of Caracalla. They were badly defeated in 269 by the Roman Emperor Claudius II, who called himself Claudius Gothicus in consequence, but who died the year after.

The Gothic menace lightened for a century thereafter. In 375, however, a group of these Goths (of tribes known as Visigoths) were driven into the Roman Empire by the Huns. Within the border of the Empire, they defeated the Romans in a great battle at Adrianople in 378. Theodosius, whom we have mentioned earlier, then ascended the Roman throne and managed to contain the Gothic menace by diplomacy and judicious bribery, rather than by military victories.

After Theodosius' death, the Visigoths raided Italy and took Rome itself in 410. They were not defeated at this tune but wandered out of Italy of their own accord and finally set up a kingdom in southern France that eventually expanded into and over all Spam. In 489 another branch of the Gothic nation, the Ostrogoths, invaded Italy and set up a kingdom there.

Up to this point, there isn't much hope of finding any Roman that

can serve as an inspiration for Titus Andronicus. Nowhere is there a general who fought long wars against the Goths and won. We must look still later in time.

In the prose story *The Tragical History of Titus Andronicus,* the Goths are said to have invaded Italy under their king "Tottilius."

Actually there was a king of the Ostrogoths, of nearly that name, who fought in Italy. He was Totila, who ruled from 541 to 552.

Here is what happened. Although the Germanic tribes had settled the Western provinces of the Roman Empire, the Eastern provinces remained intact and were ruled from Constantinople. In 527 Justinian became Roman Emperor in Constantinople and was determined to reconquer the West. In 535 he sent his great general, Belisarius, to Italy, and with that began a twenty-year (not a mere ten-year) war of Roman and Goth, in which the Romans were eventually victorious.

Belisarius won initial victories, but the Goths rallied when Totila became king. Belisarius was recalled and replaced with another general, Narses (a eunuch, the only one of importance in military history), who finally defeated Totila in 552 and completed the conquest of Italy in 556. In the *Tragical History* Titus Andronicus was a governor of Greece and came from Greece to rescue Italy, and that fits too.

Again, the name "Andronicus" is best known in history as that of several emperors who ruled in Constantinople, so that the very name of Titus Andronicus focuses our attention on the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Finally, both Belisarius and Narses were ill requited by ungrateful emperors, and the tale of *Titus Andronicus* tells how the general of the title is ill requited by an ungrateful Emperor.

We can suppose then that *Titus Andronicus* was inspired by the events of the tune of Belisarius and Narses, but none of the events in the play actually match the events in history.

> Half of the number.. .

The two royal brothers retire before the awesome name of the victorious general.

In comes Titus Andronicus with a coffin and draws sad attention to his family's sufferings in the wars:

> … of five and twenty valiant sons,
> Half of the number that King Priam had,
> Behold the poor remains, alive and dead!

—Act I, scene i, lines 79-81

Priam is, of course, the King of Troy (see page I-79) whom legend credited with fifty sons. Of Titus' twenty-five sons, no less than twenty have died in the course of the ten-year war with the Goths. The twenty-first is brought back dead in his coffin from the latest battle, while the last four living sons attend it sorrowfully.

Also with them are Tamora, the captured Queen of the Goths, and her three sons.

… the dreadful shore of Styx

Andronicus' first care is to bury the dead son with due pagan rites. He reproaches himself for being so slow to do it:

Titus, unkind and careless of thine own,
Why suffer'st thou thy sons, unburied yet,
To hover on the dreadful shore of Styx?

—Act I, scene i, lines 86-88

The Styx is the river that marks the boundary of Hades. The shades of dead men cannot cross that river till they have been buried with the proper ritual, and must till then hover disconsolately on its shore.

… Scythia…

Andronicus' sons demand that a human sacrifice be dedicated on the occasion of the funeral of their dead brother so that his soul may rest in peace. (An example of why the play cannot be placed in a Christian setting.)

Titus Andronicus orders Alarbus, the oldest son of Tamora, Queen of the Goths, to be so sacrificed. Tamora pleads against it in a speech that can't help but appeal to us, but the stern Titus insists, not out of cruelty but out of what he conceives to be religious devotion.

Chiron, Tamora's youngest son, cries out:

Was never Scythia half so barbarous.

—Act I, scene i, line 131

When Greece was at its height, the Scythians were a nomadic people who lived on the plains north of the Black Sea. The Greeks knew little about them, but knew the area they inhabited to be tremendous and their numbers large. They were for some reason considered the epitome of bar-barousness by the Greeks, and their name, so maligned, has been used in that fashion ever since.

… the Thracian tyrant.. .

Tamora's remaining son, Demetrius, sounds a darker note:

The selfsame gods that armed the Queen of Troy
With opportunity of sharp revenge
Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent
May favor Tamora, the Queen of Goths,

—Act I, scene i, lines 136-39

The Trojan Queen is Hecuba (see page I-85), who had sent her youngest son, Polydorus, for safekeeping to the court of the Thracian king, Polymnestor. After the fall of Troy, when all of Hecuba's other children were killed (save Helenus), Polymnestor was persuaded by the Greeks to kill Polydorus too.

Hecuba discovered this and persuaded Polymnestor to visit destroyed Troy by promising to reveal to him a treasure in its ruins. He came to Troy with his two sons and, according to the tale, Hecuba in a fit of despairing fury managed to stab his two sons to death and tear out Polymnestor's eyes.

Nevertheless, the sacrifice takes place and Lucius, the oldest of Titus' remaining sons, announces the result in triumphant goriness:

Alarbus' limbs are lopped,
And entrails feed the sacrificing fires,

—Act I, scene i, lines 143-44

With that, the tale of double revenge begins-first Tamora's and then Titus'. And Demetrius' allusion to Hecuba indicates the crude and brutal bloodiness of what is ahead.

… to Solan's happiness

Titus' twenty-first son is thus buried and his brother, Marcus, points out (prophetically) that it is safer to be dead:

> … safer triumph is this funeral pomp,
> That hath aspired to Salon's happiness.

—Act I, scene i, lines 176-77

This refers to the tale (probably apocryphal) of the visit of the great Athenian lawgiver, Solon, to the Asia Minor kingdom of Lydia. The rich king of Lydia, Croesus, displayed his treasures to Solon and then asked the Greek if this was not happiness indeed. Solon replied, sternly, "Call no man happy till he is dead." In other words, while there is life there is the possibility of disaster.

Of course, the disasters come. Croesus is defeated by Cyrus the Persian, his country is taken away, his throne is lost, and he himself is placed at the stake to be burned to death. Then he remembers Solon's remark and calls out the Athenian's name. The curious Cyrus asks the details and, on hearing the story, spares Croesus' life.

> … the sacred Pantheon.. .

The throne is offered Titus Andronicus, who refuses it on the ground that he is too old. The sons of the old Emperor now show signs of breaking into rivalry again, but Andronicus ends it by speaking for Saturninus, the elder. He calls him:

> Lord Saturnine; whose virtues will, I hope,
> Reflect on Rome as Titan's rays on Earth,

—Act I, scene i, lines 225-26

Titan is, of course, one of the names for the sun (see page I-11). Saturninus is promptly crowned and as promptly shows his gratitude:

> Titus, to advance Thy name and honorable family,
> Lavinia will I make my empress.
> Rome's royal mistress, mistress of my heart,
> And in the sacred Pantheon her espouse.

—Act I, scene i, lines 238-42

Lavinia is Titus' daughter, noble and virtuous. Her name recalls a Lavinia of Roman legend, the daughter of Latinus, who was king of that region in Italy where Rome was later to be founded. The Trojan hero Aeneas, coming to Italy from fallen Troy (see page I-20), married Lavinia and founded the city of Lavinium, named in her honor. Lavinium was the parent city of Alba Longa and that, in turn, was the parent city of Rome.

A pantheon ("all gods") is any building dedicated to the gods generally. *The* Pantheon is in Rome, a structure first built under the sponsorship of Agrippa (see page I-340), the general and son-in-law of Octavius Caesar, in 27 b.c. It was rebuilt in its present form about a.d. 120 by the Emperor Hadrian. It is the one Roman building that remains in perfect preservation and it is still a place of worship, having been consecrated a Christian church in 609. In the time of Belisarius, then, it was in its last century as a pagan temple (though by that time there were virtually no pagans left in Italy).

… the stately Phoebe. ..

All seems well and then, with the suddenness of a summer thunderstorm, everything falls apart.

Bassianus, the new Emperor's younger brother, sets up a cry that Lavinia is his and begins to carry her away. Lavinia's four brothers are on Bassianus' side in this-apparently there is a recognized betrothal here, although no hint of that was given earlier-and so is Lavinia's uncle, Marcus.

Only Titus Andronicus stands out against them in rigid observance of his honor, for he has formally given Lavinia to Saturninus.

Titus dashes after his sons and kills Mutius, one of them. This is the twenty-second son of Titus to die.

Saturninus, however, orders Andronicus to make no further attempt to get Lavinia back. He has suddenly fallen in love with Tamora anyway and prefers to have the Gothic Queen as his wife. He describes her as:

… lovely Tamora, Queen of Goths,
That like the stately Phoebe 'mongst her nymphs
Dost overshine the gallant'st dames of Rome,

—Act I, scene i, lines 316-18

This comparison to Phoebe (see page I-12), goddess of the moon (with alternate names like Selene, Diana, and Artemis), seems odd. Tamora is no young maid who might aptly be compared to the virginal goddess, but is the widowed mother of three grown sons.

Nevertheless, Saturninus prepares to marry her at once:

> Sith priest and holy water are so near,
> And tapers burn so bright and everything
> In readiness for Hymenaeus stand,

—Act I, scene i, lines 324-26

Hymenaeus is a longer form of Hymen, god of marriage (see page I-55).

> … wise Laertes' son

Titus Andronicus, defied by his family and snubbed by the Emperor who owes him everything, suddenly finds himself alone and dishonored, only minutes after he had been offered the imperial crown itself.

Yet Titus sticks to honor. He is even unwilling to have his dead son buried in the family tomb because he died opposing Titus' conception of proper obedience to the Emperor. Marcus, however, argues:

> The Greeks upon advice did bury Ajax
> That slew himself; and wise Laertes' son
> Did graciously plead for his funerals:

—Act I, scene i, lines 380-82

Ajax and Ulysses contended for the armor of Achilles after the latter's death (see page I-110). When Ulysses received the award, Ajax went mad and killed himself. Marcus points out that the Greeks, despite the dishonor of Ajax's last deeds, his madness and suicide, finally decided to give him honorable burial in view of the greatness

of his earlier deeds. Ulysses himself (who is "Laertes' son") argued in favor of that.

Given this precedent, Titus allows the burial of his twenty-second son.

Other reconciliations are also made. Tamora, the new Empress, plays the role of peacemaker, reconciling the Emperor Saturninus with his younger brother, Bassianus (now married to Lavinia), and with his general, Titus Andronicus. (Nevertheless, she promises her new husband, in an aside, to take proper revenge on them all in due time.)

Titus Andronicus accepts the new peace and suggests a great hunt for the next day.

… Prometheus tied to Caucasus

All now leave the stage after the single action-packed scene of the first act, and one person alone remains to begin the second act, a person who has been on stage most of the first act but who till now has not spoken a single line. It is Aaron the Moor. Behind his existence is some complicated background.

The ancient Greeks could not help but notice that the inhabitants of the southern shores of the Mediterranean were somewhat darker in complexion than they themselves were. There would be a tendency to call the inhabitants of northern Africa "the dark ones."

The Greek word for "dark" is *mauros,* and this name came to be applied to north Africans. In Latin the word became *maurus* and this was the origin, in particular, of the name of a kingdom on the northwestern shoulder of the African continent, which came to be called Mauretania- the kingdom over which Cleopatra's daughter ruled in Augustus' time (see page I-385).

From the Latin *maurus,* came the French *Maures,* the Spanish *Moros* and the English "Moors." In the eighth century armies from north Africa (now Moslem in religion) invaded Spain and southern France. In the ninth century they invaded Sicily and Italy. Europeans came to know the Moors with a discomforting intimacy.

(There was a tendency for the Spaniards, who did not evict the Moors till nearly eight centuries had passed after their first invasion, to apply the name to all Moslems. In 1565 they occupied the Philippine Islands and were astonished to find tribes in the southern islands who were Moslems. Two centuries before the Spaniards came, Moslem traders had been visiting the islands and Moslem missionaries had converted the natives. The Spaniards called these southern Filipinos Moros, and the name is retained even today.)

In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese mariners, exploring down the coasts of west Africa, brought back black slaves and there began a

new version of the abominable practice of human slavery. Since it was customary to call Africans "Moors," this new variety of African was called "black Moors" or "blackamoors." And then, to save syllables, they might still be called simply "Moors."

Aaron, in this play, though called a Moor, is distinctly a blackamoor, as we can tell from numerous illusions. The likelihood of a black being present in the Italy of Belisarius' time is not entirely zero. After all, the power of the East Roman Emperor, Justinian, extended far up the Nile. Why he should be associated with the Gothic armies is more puzzling-but then there is no question of any historical accuracy. He is introduced merely as a convenient villain.

A "Moor" would make a wonderful villain and an inhuman one at that. To the Elizabethans, the strange and therefore repulsive features of a black face and the habit of equating blackness with the devil made blacks a natural stereotype for villainy. (Such irrational thinking on the part of whites has caused innumerable blacks innumerable separate agonies then and since.)

Aaron ruminates on Tamora's sudden climb to the peak but is not disturbed thereby. Her rise is his as well, and he tells himself to:

> fit thy thoughts
> To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress,
> And mount her pitch, whom thou in triumph long
> Hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains,
> And faster bound to Aaron's charming eyes
> Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus.

—Act II, scene i, lines 12-17

Prometheus was a Titan who stole fire from the sun and gave it to poor shivering mortals, in defiance of a decree of Zeus. In punishment Zeus chained him with divine, unbreakable fetters to Mount Caucasus (which Greeks imagined to be somewhere east of the Black Sea, and which gave its name to the Caucasian range of mountains which is really there.)

The fact that Tamora is so in love with Aaron mirrors another convention that was found in the literature of the time. Whites seemed to imagine that black men had some unusual power of attraction over white women; perhaps because of their supposedly more primitive "animal" nature and therefore their supposedly more powerful sexual prowess.

> … this Semiramis.. .

Aaron goes on to glory in the prospect of what will come. He expects

> To wanton with this queen,
> This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,
> This siren, that will charm Rome's Saturnine
> And see his shipwrack and his commonweal's.

—Act II, scene i, lines 21-24

In 810 b.c. a queen, Sammu-rammat, ruled the kingdom of Assyria. She didn't rule either long or effectively, and Assyria was, at the time, rather weak. In the next century, however, Assyria rose to world power and dominated western Asia with its fearful and ruthless armies.

The dun memory that mighty and terrifying Assyria was once ruled by a woman seemed to impress the Greeks, for they distorted Sammu-rammat to Semiramis and began to weave legends around her. She was supposed to have been a great conquering monarch, who founded Babylon, established a huge empire, reigned forty-two years, and even tried to conquer India.

As if this were not enough to render her colorful, the Greeks also imagined her to be a monster of lust and luxury with numerous lovers and insatiable desires, so that the name "Semiramis" has come to be applied to any lustful woman in high place.

> … Vulcan's badge

Aaron's soliloquy is interrupted by Tamora's two remaining sons, Chiron and Demetrius, who have suddenly decided, each one of them, to fall in love with Lavinia and are now quarreling over it. Aaron reminds them that she is the wife of Bassianus, the Emperor's brother. This does not bother Demetrius, who says:

> Though Bassianus be the Emperor's brother,
> Better than he have worn Vulcan's badge.

—Act II, scene i, lines 88-89

This is a reference to Vulcan's cuckoldry, thanks to the love affair of his wife, Venus, with Mars (see page I-11).

Aaron thinks the quarrel is foolish. Why don't they both enjoy Lavinia in turn? To do this, persuasion will not be enough, for, as he says:

> Lucrece was not more chaste
> Than this Lavinia,

—Act II, scene i, lines 108-9

Lucrece, of course, is the Roman matron who was dealt with in *The Rape of Lucrece* (see page I-205), and is Shakespeare's favorite symbol of chastity. *(The Rape of Lucrece* was written at just about the time *Titus Andronicus* was. Might it be that this line set Shakespeare to thinking of the poem, or was it that the poem was running on in his mind and inspired this line?)

There are other ways than persuasion to win Lavinia, however. Coolly, Aaron points out that in the course of the next day's hunt, they might ambush her and rape her in turn. The two Gothic princes agree enthusiastically.

> Saturn is dominator…

Time moves on and the hunt starts. During its course, Aaron finds a spot in the forest where he may hide a bag of gold for a nefarious purpose that is still in the future.

Tamora comes upon him and urges him on to dalliance such as

> The wandering prince and Dido once enjoyed,

—Act II, scene iii, line 22

This is another reference to Dido and Aeneas (see page I-20), a favorite mythical standby of Shakespeare's.

Aaron, however, has more important business at hand. He says:

> Madam, though Venus govern your desires,
> Saturn is dominator over mine:

—Act II, scene iii, lines 30-31

Astrologically speaking, each person is born under the domination of a particular planet which determines the major component of his or her personality. The nature of the influence of Venus is obvious.

Saturn is, of all the planets visible to the unaided eye, the farthest from Earth and therefore the most slowly moving among the stars. To be born under Saturn then is to be as heavy, grave, and gloomy as that slow-moving planet; to be "saturnine," in short.

His Philomel. ..

Aaron goes on to explain why he is so grave and gloomy. Dire thoughts of revenge are in his mind and he refers to:

My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls
Even as an adder when she doth unroll
To do some fatal execution?

—Act II, scene iii, lines 34-36

Mention of his "fleece of woolly hair" shows clearly that Shakespeare has in mind a black African and not the swarthy but non-black Moors of north Africa.

Aaron goes on to specifics, indicating that he has set in motion a horrible fate for Lavinia. He says:

This is the day of doom for Bassianus:
His Philomel must lose her tongue today,

—Act II, scene iii, lines 42-43

One of the more gruesome Greek myths deals with two sisters: Philomela and Procne, who were the daughters of a king of Athens. The latter was given in marriage to Tereus, the King of Thrace. Tereus, however, fell in love with Philomela, his sister-in-law, and, luring her to his court, raped her. Then, in order to prevent her from telling his

crime, he cut her tongue out and hid her among his slaves.

The phrase "lose her tongue" can therefore be a metaphoric reference to rape. It turns out to be a literal forecast in this play.

… as was Actaeon's…

Aaron gives Tamora a letter to be used later in the development of his plan and leaves.

At this point, Bassianus and Lavinia enter. All are at the hunt, of course, and Tamora, in her hunting costume, is sardonically likened to Diana, the goddess of the hunt, by Bassianus. Tamora is offended at what she considers to be their spying and says:

> Had I the power that some say Dion had
> Thy temples should be planted presently
> With horns, as was Actaeon's, and the hounds
> Should drive upon thy new-transformed limbs,

—Act II, scene iii, lines 61-64

Actaeon was a hunter in the Greek myths, who, in the course of a hunt, came inadvertently upon Diana bathing. Admiring, he stopped to watch. When he was caught at his peeping by Diana's nymphs, the indignant goddess turned him into a stag so that his own hounds ran him down and killed him.

The reference to the horns on Bassianus' head undoubtedly has the secondary purpose of referring to the planned rape of his wife.

.. your swart Cimmerian

Bassianus and Lavinia strike back by implying that Tamora has been surprised at something far less innocent than bathing and speak openly of her liaison with Aaron. Bassianus says:

> Believe me, Queen, your swart Cimmerian
> Doth make your honor of his body's hue,

—Act II, scene iii, lines 72-73

The Scythians, who lived north of the Black Sea (see page I-397),

ar-rived there only in 700 b.c. Before that, the land was populated by those whom Homer named the Cimmerians. (Crimea, the peninsula jutting into he northern rim of the Black Sea, is thought to derive its name from hem.)

The Cimmerian regions were mistily distant to the Greeks of Homer's time and strange legends arose concerning them. They were supposed to live in a land of eternal mist and gloom where the sun never shone. (One wonders if explorers brought back tales of the polar regions.)

As a result, one speaks of "Cimmerian darkness" as expressing the ultimate in darkness. Aaron is a "Cimmerian" not because he comes from the Far North, but because his skin is so dark.

.. Cocytus" misty mouth

But now the cruel machinations of Aaron begin to work.

Tamora's two sons, Chiron and Demetrius, enter. Tamora tells them that she has been lured to the spot by Bassianus and Lavinia for evil purposes. The two Gothic princes promptly stab Bassianus, hide his body in a deep pit, and drag Lavinia offstage to rape her, each in turn, with Tamora egging them on fiendishly. She refuses the girl's pleas for mercy, reminding her of how Titus Andronicus had refused her own pleas for mercy for her oldest son.

She leaves and Aaron enters, guiding Quintus and Martius, two of Andronicus' three remaining sons. Martius slips into the pit in which Bassianus' body is hidden and while Quintus leans over anxiously to find out if he is hurt, Aaron slips away.

Martius discovers the body of Bassianus and is horrified. He says:

So pale did shine the moon on Pyramus,
When he by night lay bathed in maiden blood.
O brother, help me with thy fainting hand-
If fear hath made thee faint, as me it hath-
Out of this fell devouring receptacle
As hateful as Cocytus' misty mouth.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 231-36

Pyramus was an ill-fated lover in the ancient tale, who died by moonlight (see page I-23). Cocytus is one of the five rivers of the underworld and its name means "wailing." It is meant to symbolize the sorrow of death.

A craftier Tereus...

The horrors continue. Aaron brings the Emperor Saturninus on the scene and Quintus and Martius are found with Bassianus' body. The forged letter, prepared by Aaron, is produced to make it seem that the two had bribed a huntsman to kill Bassianus. The bribe in the shape of the bag of gold Aaron had planted on the scene is also produced.

Titus' sons, having been effectively framed, are dragged off to imprisonment at once.

All leave and Tamora's sons now emerge. They have raped Lavinia and have cut out her tongue to prevent her telling. They have, however, gone the old Greek myth one better, for they have cut off her hands as well. Chiron says, with sadistic humor:

> Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so,
> And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 3-4

The princes leave, and Marcus, the brother of Titus Andronicus, comes upon the scene and discovers Lavinia. He grasps the meaning of the sight at once and says:

> Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue,
> And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind:
> But lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee;
> A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,
> And he hath cut those pretty fingers off,
> That could have better sewed than Philomel.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 38-43

In the Greek myth, Philomela had had her tongue cut out and been placed in the slaves' quarters. She could use her hands to reveal her secret, however, for she prepared a tapestry in which she wove the legend, "Philomela is among the slaves." This was delivered to her sister, Procne, who took instant action, liberating Philomela and preparing revenge.

By cutting off Lavinia's hands, the villainous princes had deprived

her of Philomela's chance.

Marcus Andronicus finds it hard to believe anyone could have mangled so fair a person as Lavinia. Concerning the malefactor, Marcus says that

> … had he heard the heavenly harmony
> Which that sweet tongue hath made,
> He would have dropped his knife, and fell asleep
> As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 48-51

Orpheus, the sweet-singing minstrel from Thrace ("the Thracian poet"), descended into the underworld in order to win back his dead love, Eurydice (see page I-47). On approaching Cerberus (see page I-101), the three-headed hellhound who guarded the entrance, he sang so soft and sweet a lullaby that even that horrible creature fell asleep and let him pass unharmed.

> … Tarquin and his queen

Unimaginable miseries now heap themselves on Titus Andronicus. His two sons, Quintus and Martius, are being led to execution and no one will hear his pleas on their behalf. His one remaining son, Lucius, has tried to rescue his brothers by force, has failed, and is sentenced to exile. Marcus then brings him the mutilated Lavinia and Titus breaks into fresh woe.

All is interrupted by Aaron, who brings the news that if one of the Andronici, Titus, Marcus, or Lucius, will sacrifice a hand, that hand would be accepted as an exchange for the lives of Titus' two sons, who would then be returned free. After an argument over which Andronicus should make the sacrifice, Titus wins out and his hand is struck off.

This is but to add to the sorrows of Titus, however, for his stricken hand is soon returned and with it the heads of his two sons, who had been executed anyway. Of all Titus' children, there now remain only Lucius and the mutilated Lavinia.

Tamora has had ample revenge for the loss of her son and now it is Titus who begins to plan revenge. So does Lucius, still under sentence of exile. Alone on the stage, he plans to go abroad and raise an army against Rome, saying to his absent father, in soliloquy:

// Lucius live, he will requite your wrongs, And make proud Saturnine

and his empress Beg at the gates, like Tarquin and his queen.

—Act III, scene i, lines 296-98

Tarquin was the last king of ancient Rome, who was expelled from Rome in 509 b.c. (see page I-211). He had occasion to stand at the gates of Rome in an attempt to get the throne back, and failed. To be sure, he didn't beg in the usual sense of the word. He had an army at his back.

The idea of revenge by means of an outside army fits in just a little with the time of Belisarius and Narses. Belisarius himself never attempted revenge against the ungrateful Emperor Justinian, even though legend has him reduced, toward the end of his life, to begging in the streets. (The legend has no basis in truth, however.)

Belisarius' successor, Narses, is a different matter. He ruled Italy into extreme old age, and after Justinian's death, when Narses was more than ninety years old, the aged general was ordered home. According to the legend (probably not true) his recall was accompanied by an insulting message. He was told that since he was a eunuch, he should return and confine himself to spinning wool with the palace maidens.

The insulted Narses said, "I will spin them such a skein as they will not easily unravel" and invited the barbarous Lombards to invade Italy-which they did most effectively.

… Cornelia never with more care

The play now shifts to the Andronicus house. For the first time, a grandson of Titus appears. He is a son of Lucius and is also named Lucius.

Young Lucius enters, carrying books and running. Mute Lavinia is running after him. The boy is frightened but Titus and Marcus catch and comfort him, assuring him that Lavinia means him no harm, and loves him. Titus says:

> Ah, boy, Cornelia never with more care
> Read to her sons than she hath read to thee
> Sweet poetry and Tully's Orator.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 12-14

The Cornelia referred to was a daughter of Publius Cornelius Scipio, the Roman general who finally defeated Hannibal in 202 b.c. Cornelia was considered the model of the virtuous Roman matron, chaste, honorable, and loving-and utterly devoted to her two sons.

These two sons received the finest education available at the time. So proud was she of them that when another Roman matron, on a visit, displayed her jewelry and asked to see Cornelia's, the latter merely pointed to her sons. "These are my jewels," she said.

As for Tully, that is a name by which the great Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (see page I-268) is sometimes known in English. One of his famous works was *De Oratore (Concerning the Orator),* and it is to this that Titus refers.

> … Ovid's Metamorphoses

But Lavinia stirs the books that young Lucius has let fall, concentrating on one, which the boy identifies for his grandfather:

> Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's Metamorphoses:
> My mother gave it me.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 42-43

One of the myths contained in *Metamorphoses* (see page I-8), which deals with tales of transformations of human beings into other forms, is that of Philomela and Procne, for in the end, Philomela is turned into a nightingale and Procne into a swallow. Lavinia wants to find that tale in order to have Titus and Marcus understand that her mutilation was the result of a rape.

Clearly, this shows haste on Shakespeare's part. After all, Marcus has guessed as much when he first encountered Lavinia after the mutilation. He then said:

> But, sure, some Tereus hath deflowered thee,
> And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 26-27

It now occurs to Marcus that a person can write with a stick in the sand by holding that stick in his mouth and guiding it with his wrists. Hands are not required at all. Lavinia uses this method to reveal that Chiron and Demetrius are the guilty ones. Now Titus is certain against whom he must plan revenge.

… not Enceladus

Apparently considerable time has elapsed since the beginning of the play, for Tamora is about to have a baby and it is to be presumed that the Emperor Saturninus is the father. However, events have miscarried. It is Aaron, not Saturninus who is the father, and this is shown all too plainly in that the baby is a black infant.

Naturally, this fact must be hidden, or Tamora's infidelity will be plain even to Saturninus and she will be destroyed. The Nurse who attended Tamora brings the baby to Aaron, with instructions from Tamora to kill it and destroy the evidence.

But Aaron, in this one respect, departs from the line of flat villainy. He becomes a proud father and in words that strangely fore-echo the pride of the black activists of the 1960s, cries out to the Nurse, who is expressing disgust at the child:

> Zounds, ye whore! Is black so base a hue?
> Sweet blowze, you are a beauteous blossom, sure.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 71-72

When Chiron and Demetrius, who are also present, offer to kill their baby half brother to secure their mother's safety, Aaron draws his sword fiercely, saying:

> I tell you, younglings, not Enceladus,
> With all his threat'ning band of Typhon's brood,
> Nor great Alcides, nor the god of war,
> Shall seize this prey out of his father's hands.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 93-96

Enceladus was one of a brood of tremendous giants (with serpents for legs) which were brought forth by Mother Earth, who was annoyed to see Jupiter (Zeus) and his fellow gods destroy the Titans, for the Titans had been her children.

The giants, under Enceladus' leadership, fought the gods in a battle which, in the versions that reach us, seem to be described as a burlesque of Homer-almost a comic retelling of a myth, with grotesque exaggerations. For instance, Enceladus is killed by Athena,

who throws a huge mountain at him; a mountain that flattens him and becomes the island of Sicily.

Aaron's remark makes it seem that Enceladus and the other giants are the offspring of Typhon, but this is not so. Typhon was born after the defeat of the giants and was the greatest and most fearful monster of all. Typhon engaged Jupiter in a great duel and was almost victor, for he cut out and hid the sinews of Jupiter's hands and feet and paralyzed the great god. It wasn't till Mercury (Hermes), the god of thieves, stole back the sinews and restored Jupiter's powers of movement that Typhon was finally killed by the lightning bolts of the king of the gods.

After the mention of Enceladus and Typhon, to go on to Alcides (Hercules) and the god of war (Mars) seems distinct anticlimax.

The Gothic princes wilt before Aaron's fury and ask him what he means to do. His first act is to kill the Nurse, thus reducing, by one, the number of those who know the secret. He then prepares to change the baby for a white one who will be made heir to the throne while Aaron will secretly raise his own black baby to become a warrior.

> … one of Taurus' horns

In preparing his revenge, Titus feigns madness, meanwhile, in order to throw Saturninus and Tamora off the scent and lull them into a false security. Titus' madness (and surely he has suffered enough to make the onset of madness plausible) consists of a wild search for justice through Heaven and Hell. He cries out:

> I'll dive into the burning lake below,
> And pull her [justice] out of Acheron by the heels.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 44-45

The Acheron is another of the rivers of Hades. (Two others, Styx and Cocytus, have already been mentioned in this play.)

Titus goes on to bemoan the physical shortcomings of the Andronici, in the face of so huge an undertaking as the search for justice. He says to his brother:

> Marcus, we are but shrubs, no cedars we,
> No big-boned men framed of the Cyclops' size.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 46-47

The Cyclopes were one-eyed giants who forged the lightning for Jupiter. They were also a race of giants who lived on Sicily in the time of the Trojan War. At least Ulysses, on his return from Troy, falls in with one of them in particular, Polyphemus, and defeats him-one of the best-known events in the *Odyssey*.

The main thrust of the search for justice, however, consists in shooting arrows into the sky with letters attached; letters that plead with the gods for justice. Titus has all the Andronici helping him in this respect. He advances his own apparent madness by pretending to see the effects of the action in the constellations, which he describes as though having literal existence.

He exclaims to young Lucius:

> Good boy, in Virgo's lap; give it Pallas.

—Act IV, scene iii, line 65

To Publius, the son of Marcus, he says:

> Publius, Publius, what hast thou done!
> See, see, thou hast shot off one of Taurus' horns.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 69-70

Virgo (the Maiden) and Taurus (the Bull) are both included among the signs of the zodiac. Very likely most of Shakespeare's audience did suspect that the imaginary creatures pieced out in the sky by the imaginary lines connecting stars existed there in literal truth. The humor lay in the thought that man-hurled arrows could reach them. (Pallas, by the way, is an alternate name for the Greek goddess Athena.)

Marcus keeps the play at madness going. He says to Titus:

> … When Publius shot,
> The bull being galled, gave Aries such a knock
> That down fell both the Ram's horns in the court,
> And who should find them but the Empress' villain? [Aaron]
> She [Tamora] laughed, and told the Moor he should not
> choose But give them to his master for a present.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 71-76

Aries (the Ram) is also a constellation of the zodiac. It neighbors Taurus so that one can well imagine the Bull charging the Ram. It enables Marcus to get off a kind of joke beloved by the Elizabethans, concerning the cuckolding of the Emperor.

… as ever Coriolanus did

If it is Titus' plan to lull the Emperor and Empress into total security, it falls short. Saturninus is furious at the letters of appeal to the heavens, since they end in Rome's streets where they are found by the people, who grow to sympathize with the ill-treated Titus.

The Emperor is further irritated by a Clown (a lowborn person, that is) who delivers a message to him from Titus. The Emperor forthwith orders the Clown hanged.

He prepares to go further and have Titus arrested, when a messenger arrives to say that a Gothic army is at the gates of Rome:

They hither march amain, under conduct
Of Lucius, son to old Andronicus;
Who threats, in course of this revenge, to do
As much as ever Coriolanus did.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 66-69

Coriolanus was a legendary figure in early Roman history who, out of revenge for what he considered mistreatment, raised an enemy army, placed himself at its head, and laid siege to Rome. Fifteen years after Shakespeare wrote *Titus Andronicus* he wrote *Coriolanus* about the earlier event (see page I-245).

Tamora, however, promises to make Lucius into a Coriolanus indeed. Coriolanus withdrew without taking Rome because his mother begged him to (see page I-250). Now Tamora intends to try to persuade Titus to beg his son to withdraw. (She is not aware that Titus has discovered the full extent of the villainy of her sons.)

… worse than Procne …

The scene shifts to the outskirts of Rome, where Lucius is leading

the Gothic army to the city's walls. A Goth has captured Aaron, who has been trying to find a place of safety for his baby. Lucius, when Aaron is brought to him, threatens to hang father and child, and, to save the baby, Aaron confesses all.

Meanwhile, Tamora has worked out her plan to persuade Titus to call off his son. She proposes to take advantage of his madness by disguising herself as Revenge and her two sons as Rape and Murder (that is, as spirits specifically designed to avenge those two crimes).

In her guise as Revenge, Tamora promises to make mad Titus quits with all his enemies and asks him, in turn, to send for his son, Lucius, to attend a feast which Titus will give. It will then be Revenge's part (supposedly) to bring in the Emperor, the Empress, and the Empress' sons for Titus to wreak vengeance upon. (Actually, it is Tamora's plan, once she has Lucius with Titus, to have both killed, and then somehow to arrange to have the leaderless Goths dispersed.)

Titus pretends to fall in with this plan and sends Marcus to invite Lucius to the feast.

But then, when Revenge turns to leave, Titus insists on keeping Rape and Murder. Otherwise, he says, he will call back Marcus and leave things as they were. Tamora orders her sons to humor him and leaves by herself.

Once Tamora is gone, Titus instantly calls his friends and orders Rape and Murder tied up. They announce themselves to be the Empress' sons, hoping this will awe their assailants, but Titus merely orders them gagged. He then tells them what he intends to do by way of revenge, saying:

> For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,
> And worse than Procne I will be revenged.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 195-96

When Procne discovered what her husband, Tereus, had done to Philomela, she took a horrible revenge. She killed Itys, the young son of Tereus and herself, boiled his flesh, and fed it to Tereus.

This Titus intended to surpass. They had cut off not only the tongue but the hands of Lavinia. In return, Titus intended to have their mother feed on not one, but two sons.

With that, he cuts the throats of Chiron and Demetrius, catching the blood in a basin held by Lavinia.

> … rash Virginius

The feast begins now. All are present (even Aaron and his baby). Titus, dressed as a cook, poses the Emperor a question:

> Was it well done of rash Virginius
> To slay his daughter with his own right hand,
> Because she was enforced, stained, and deflow'red?
>
> —Act V, scene iii, lines 36-38

Virginius was a plebeian soldier who, according to legend, lived about 450 b.c. (a generation after Coriolanus). His beautiful daughter, Virginia, attracted the attention of Appius Claudius, a patrician who was then the most powerful man in Rome. Appius Claudius planned to seize the girl by having false witnesses testify that the girl was actually the daughter of one of his slaves and was therefore also his slave.

The distracted Virginius, seeing no way of stopping Appius Claudius, suddenly stabbed his daughter to death in the midst of the trial, proclaiming that only through death could he save her honor.

Titus Andronicus states the situation erroneously, by the way. Virginius' daughter was not "enforced, stained, and deflow'red." She was merely threatened with that.

Saturninus says that Virginius was justified in his action, whereupon Titus promptly stabs Lavinia to death. When Saturninus angrily demands the reason for that action, Titus says she has been raped by Chiron and Demetrius, and that they in turn have been killed and baked into a pie which the Empress is at that moment eating.

Titus then stabs and kills Tamora; at which the Emperor Saturninus stabs and kills Titus; at which Lucius stabs and kills Saturninus.

> … what Sinon…

A Roman Lord now asks Lucius what has brought Rome to this civil war and assassination:

> Tell us what Sinon hath bewitched our ears,
> Or who hath brought the fatal engine in
> That gives our Troy, our Rome, the civil wound

—Act V, scene iii, lines 85-87

Sinon is the Greek who persuaded the Trojans to allow entry to the wooden horse ("the fatal engine") and made the final sack of the city possible (see page I-210).

I do repent…

Lucius and Marcus, between them, now tell all the wrongs done the Andronici by the Emperor, the Empress, her sons, and Aaron. They even show Aaron's baby as proof of another kind of wickedness.

The appalled Romans hail Lucius as the new Emperor and call in Aaron for punishment. Lucius orders that he be buried breast-deep in the earth and allowed to starve to death.

Even now, Aaron refuses to crawl, and one can't help but feel a kind of sneaking admiration for his defiance. He says, ferociously, after having heard his doom:

/ am no baby, I, that with base prayers
I should repent the evils I have done:
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
Would I perform, if I might have my will:
If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 185-90

It is a fitly grisly speech to end a grisly play that opens with:
(1) the dead body of one of Titus' sons, then continues with
(2) the sacrifice of Tamora's son, Alarbus, by Lucius,
(3) the stabbing of Mutius by his father, Titus,
(4) the stabbing of Bassianus by Chiron and Demetrius,
(5) the rape and mutilation of Lavinia by Chiron and Demetrius,
(6) the mutilation of Titus by Aaron,
(7) the execution of Martius and
(8) Quintus, by order of the Emperor,
(9) the stabbing of the Nurse by Aaron,
(10) the hanging of a Clown for small offense by Saturninus' order,
(11) the throat-cutting of Chiron and
(12) Demetrius by Titus,
(13) the unwitting cannibalism of Tamora,

(14) the stabbing of Lavinia by Titus,
(15) the stabbing of Tamora by Titus,
(16) the stabbing of Titus by Saturninus,
(17) the stabbing of Saturninus by Lucius, and finally,
(18) the projected death by slow starvation of Aaron.

Part III. Italian

14. Love's Labor's Lost

There are fifteen of Shakespeare's plays which deal with English history or English legend. If I adhered to strict chronological sequence, these would follow here. If I did that, however, the division between the two volumes of this book would fall inconveniently in the middle of those plays. I am consequently leaving the fifteen English plays to make up *in toto* the second volume.

We will conclude this first volume then with a dozen romances which are placed in Renaissance Italy and surrounding regions, and which are, for Shakespeare, contemporary. There is no clear historical background and even where some reference can be pinpointed to this or that year, this is not significant and will not do as a method of deciding the order in which the plays should be presented.

In this final part of the volume, then, the plays that remain will be placed in the order in which (it is thought) Shakespeare wrote them.

And of these *Love's Labor's Lost* is possibly the earliest. Along with *The Comedy of Errors* it has sometimes been dated as early as 1588, though dates as late as 1593 are possible.

The play doesn't seem to have been intended for wide public popularity, and may have been written for private performance. One possibility is that it was intended for a celebration at the home of the Earl of Southampton (see page I-3). If so, the play must have been an astounding success, for Southampton then became Shakespeare's generous patron.

If *Love's Labor's Lost* were indeed written primarily for the entertainment of a coterie of men interested in art, that would explain the over-elaboration of much of the style. The play was a satire on pedantry, and its complicated verbiage and intrusive Latinity would appeal to the sense of humor of the educated. Both the elaborateness and the Latinity have tended to diminish the popularity of the play considerably in later times.

Navarre shall be…

The play opens with a King and his three companions on stage. The King is announcing his decision to retire for three years (along with his companions) to a sober and austere study of philosophy. He is very optimistic about the effect this will have, for he says:

Navarre shall be the wonder of the world;

Our court shall be a little academe,

—Act I, scene i, lines 12-13

The speaker is, according to the cast of characters, Ferdinand, King of Navarre.

Navarre does not exist as an independent kingdom on our maps today (or on the maps of Shakespeare's time, for that matter), and most people would be at a loss to point out where it might ever have existed. It is not a mythical land, however; it is no Ruritania. It once did exist indeed, and in medieval times it constituted a sizable region about the western end of the Pyrenees. Mostly, it lay to the south and west of that range in what is now north-central Spain, but some of its territory lay to the north in what is now southwestern France.

Through the Middle Ages, it maintained an increasingly precarious independence between France on the north and the growing strength of the other Christian kingdoms of the Spanish peninsula. In 1474 Aragon and Castile (the two most important of those kingdoms) were bound together when Ferdinand, Crown Prince of Aragon, married Isabella, Queen of Castile. In 1479 Ferdinand succeeded to the crown of Aragon, and under the united rule of himself and Isabella, modern Spain was formed. (The two monarchs were the parents of Catherine, the ill-fated first wife of Henry VIII, see page II-754.)

Navarre could not stand against the union of the kingdoms. The portion of Navarre south of the Pyrenees was occupied by Ferdinand in 1512 and made an integral part of the Spanish crown in 1515.

The part of the kingdom north of the Pyrenees was under the rule of Catherine de Foix, who married Jean d'Albret (a descendant of the Constable of France, who had died at the Battle of Agincourt, see page II-475). Jean d'Albret called himself King of Navarre and his son succeeded to the title, as Henry II of Navarre, in 1517, when his mother died.

Naturally, Ferdinand of Spam claimed the rule of all Navarre, but in order to establish that claim he would have had to fight France, which held the actual control of northern Navarre. This Ferdinand never tried to do, and Henry II remained titular King of Navarre. That is, he had the title but no more; in actual fact, he was merely a French nobleman and had none of the power of an independent monarch.

Henry II married Margaret (or Marguerite, in the French spelling), who was sister to King Francis I (see page II-747). She is consequently known in history books as Margaret of Navarre, and it was she who,

before this marriage, had been thought of by Wolsey as a possible second wife for Henry VIII (see page II-69).

Henry had a daughter, Jeanne d'Albret, who was Queen of Navarre from 1562 to 1572. Her son was another Henry, who in 1572 became Henry III of Navarre, but is known to history simply as Henry of Navarre because, first, he was by far the most important ruler Navarre ever had, and second, because in his time the King of France was also Henry III and to use the same Roman numeral for both would lead to confusion.

Through his father, Henry of Navarre was a member of the family of Bourbon, which, through a solid line of male ancestors, was descended from a younger son of King Louis IX (see page II-457) who had died in 1270. Now, three centuries later, only one male descendant remained of the older lines and he was Henry III of France, who became king in 1574. If Henry III died without surviving sons (and he was a homosexual who never had children), Henry IV (who was thoroughly and spectacularly heterosexual) was the next in line to the throne.

This would not ordinarily have made much of a stir except that France had been involved in a religious civil war for a dozen years, one in which a sizable and militant Protestant minority was stanchly withstanding the Catholic majority. As it happened, Henry of Navarre was a Protestant and, in view of his position as prospective heir to the throne, the leader of the Protestant faction. There were many Frenchmen, on the other hand, determined that no Protestant should ever be King of France, regardless of his descent.

This standoff was the situation when *Love's Labor's Lost* was written. England, as it happened, had just defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, and had heroically foiled a vast Spanish-Catholic attempt to subvert the Protestant character of the island kingdom. England was consequently all on fire with the picture of itself as the Protestant David hacking down the great Catholic Goliath of Spain. Since Spain was the chief support of the French Catholics against the possible succession of Henry of Navarre, there was much warmth and admiration for Henry in England.

It would be natural, then, for Shakespeare to write a play in which the King of Navarre was a hero and in which he was presented in the most favorable light. In order to make the situation not too pointed and topical, it was inadvisable to use the name "Henry," so he used "Ferdinand" instead. This was a favorite name during the Italian Renaissance and might have been inspired by the fact that Ferdinand II of Spain had taken over southern Navarre.

In early 1589 Henry III of France was assassinated by a fanatic monk who felt the King wasn't Catholic enough, and Henry of Navarre

succeeded to the throne as Henry IV of France. Unfortunately for the new king, the title he gained was not accepted by the Catholic party and he remained king only over his own minority. The Catholics controlled much of France, including the all-important city of Paris, and the civil war grew fiercer. Henry IV was a good general and won important victories, but against the sheer weight of Catholic intransigence he could not prevail.

In 1591 the Earl of Essex, the great friend of Southampton and Shakespeare, even led an army in support of Henry of Navarre, but Essex was a poor soldier and failed in this, as in all his military efforts (see page II-508).

Finally, in 1593, Henry of Navarre, with a sigh and a shrug, agreed to turn Catholic. Then, and only then, did Paris accept him. Henry entered the capital, was hailed as king, was eventually crowned, and became Henry IV in truth. ("Paris is worth a mass," said Henry.)

Of course, this made him a traitor to the Protestant cause and Englishmen must have reflected sardonically over the proverbial (to them) faithlessness of the French nature. It is doubtful if *Love's Labor's Lost* could possibly have been written in its present form after 1593, for that reason.

> … Berowne, Dumaine, and Longaville

No action in the play has any but the very faintest and most distant association with the real Henry of Navarre, of course, but Shakespeare continues to use reality as the source of inspiration for names at least.

Thus, the King turns to the three with him and says:

> You three, Berowne, Dumaine, and Longaville,
> Have sworn for three years' term to live with me,
> My fellow scholars …

—Act I, scene i, lines 15-17

The name Berowne may have been inspired by Armand de Gontaut, Baron de Biron, who was a close associate of Henry of Navarre and who in 1589 gained the leadership of his armies. He won victories for Henry and was killed in battle in 1592.

Biron had been closely associated with the expeditionary force led by Essex. This made Biron specially popular in England and it is not

surprising that Shakespeare makes Berowne the most attractive person in the play.

Longaville is a version of Longueville and there was a Due de Longueville also among Henry's generals.

Dumaine is not so easy to place. That name may have been inspired by Charles, Duc de Mayenne, who was associated with Henry IV, but not as a friend. Mayenne was the leader of the Catholic opposition to Henry. To be sure, after Henry's conversion Mayenne was reconciled to the King and from 1596 on remained completely loyal to him. This, however, certainly took place well after the play was written.

> The French king's daughter. ..

Berowne is the one companion who doesn't think the King's plan will work. He doubts that they can successfully make themselves strict and austere philosophers for three years. He particularly doubts they can really forswear female company, as the King plans to have them do. In fact, that would be impossible, for Berowne says:

> This article, my liege, yourself must break;
> For well you know here comes in embassy
> The French king's daughter with yourself to speak,
> A maid of grace and complete majesty,

—Act I, scene i, lines 132-35

This too has a glancing resemblance to the real-life career of Henry of Navarre. In 1572 young Henry (only nineteen at the time) was married to Marguerite de Valois (also nineteen). At that time Henry III's older brother, Charles IX, was still on the throne (he didn't die till 1574) and Marguerite was sister to both of them. All three of them, Henry III, Charles LX, and Marguerite (plus an earlier short-lived monarch, Francis II), were children of King Henry II of France, who had died in 1559.

The continuing religious civil war made the marriage no idyll, but in 1578 there was a well-publicized visit of Marguerite (along with her mother, Catherine de' Medici) to the court of Navarre. It may well have been this visit which was in Shakespeare's mind.

If the visit was intended to improve the state of the marriage, by the way, it failed miserably. Henry was interested in many ladies and Marguerite bore him no children. Finally, in 1599, their marriage was

annulled and Henry was able to marry again and beget an heir to the throne. This, however, was well after *Love's Labor's Lost* was written.

> … surrender up of Aquitaine
> And why was the French princess coming? Berowne says that the embassy is
> About surrender up of Aquitaine
> To her decrepit, sick, and bed-rid father.

—Act I, scene i, lines 136-37

The matter of Aquitaine is pure invention, of course. Even at its most powerful, Navarre never controlled that large section of southern France called Aquitaine (see page II-209). The name, however, would be a familiar one to Englishmen if only because Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the most famous of English queens.

The real Marguerite de Valois had no living father at the time of her marriage to Henry. She had been only six years old when her father died. However, the French royal family, at the time the play was written, seemed indeed decrepit, sick, and bed-rid. In 1588 Henry III of France had reigned fourteen years and though only thirty-seven was prematurely aged, and exhausted by the crises of the time and his personal excesses. Two older brothers had reigned briefly and died, one at sixteen and one at twenty-four. A younger brother was already dead at thirty, and none of the brothers left descendants.

> … Armado hight

It seems that the Princess must be greeted and entertained despite all ascetic arrangements. The cynical Berowne, delighted, inquires if there is any other and more reliable entertainment allowed the scholars than the occasional visit of a princess.

The King informs him that there is an eccentric and euphuistic Spaniard at the court who can be very entertaining, albeit unconsciously so. He refers to him as:

> This child of fancy, that Armado hight [is named],

—Act I, scene i, line 169

If the play were written in the aftermath of the great defeat of the Spanish fleet in 1588, a Spaniard would be a natural butt for the play, and his name, Armado (Don Adriano de Armado in full, according to the cast of characters), is a none too subtle recall of the defeated Armada.

There has been a tendency for some people to find satirical representations in all the characters of this play. If it were written for a small "in group" rather than for the general public, it might well contain "in jokes" against the personal enemies of the group in the audience.

Thus, the Earl of Essex had become Queen Elizabeth's favorite in the very years of the Armada (and this play) after her previous favorite, the Earl of Leicester, died. Essex's great rival was Sir Walter Raleigh, who had been Leicester's protege and whose nose had been put out of joint by the handsome Essex's greater success with the Queen. Some people therefore think that Armado was intended as a satire on Raleigh for the amusement of the Essex coterie. However, there seems little one can point to in what Armado says or does that has "Raleigh" written on it. (There are other candidates for the role of real-life Armado too, but none are really convincing.)

> Boy, what sign…

Armado at once enters the plot, indirectly, to lend humor to it. He has spied a country bumpkin, Costard, making love to a young country girl, Jaquenetta, in defiance of the published edict against association with womankind, and has reported the matter to the authorities. Costard is arrested by Constable Dull and is turned over to the custody of Armado.

It turns out, of course, that Armado is himself in love with Jaquenetta, and he displays this in the approved manner of the puling stage lover. He uses his page as a sounding board for his melancholy and says:

> Boy, what sign is it when a man
> of great spirit grows melan choly?

—Act I, scene ii, lines 1-2

The page is of the smallest possible size and is named Moth (pronounced "mote" in Shakespeare's day with the obvious pun). It is his function to be witty in Shakespearean fashion, so he answers:

A great sign, sir, that he will look sad.

—Act I, scene ii, line 3

Some people have attempted to equate Moth with Thomas Nashe, a pamphleteer who was contemporary with Shakespeare and who engaged in battles of wits in polemical style with other controversialists. He was coarse, pretentious, and arrogant.

By those who think this, Armado is equated with Gabriel Harvey, another controversialist of the time who was an opponent of Nashe's. The Armado-Moth quibbling might therefore be taken to represent, with satiric inadequacy, the Homeric polemics of Harvey and Nashe.

Samson, master …

Armado pictures himself as a warlike hero unmanned for love and demands of Moth that he give him examples of great men in love:

… and, sweet my child, let them be
men of good repute and carriage [bearing].

—Act I, scene ii, lines 68-69

Moth had already named Hercules as an example, and rightly, for he was described in the numerous myths that clustered about his name to have lain with innumerable women. Once, according to legend, he lay with fifty women in one night, impregnated them all, and ended by having fifty sons-a feat far greater, really, than all his twelve usual labors put together.

At the mention of "good repute and carriage," Moth adds, however:

Samson, master-he was a man of good carriage,
great carriage, for he carried the town-gates on his back
like a porter, and he was in love.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 70-72

The twist on the word "carriage," from carrying oneself to carrying external objects, refers to a time when Samson was visiting a harlot in Gaza. The Philistines, knowing the town gates were locked, waited for morning to deal with him, but Samson rose at midnight "and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill" (Judges 16:3) so that he got away when his enemies confidently thought he was trapped. At the time of this feat he was in love (if you can dignify the relation between himself and the woman by that word).

Later on, Armado meets Jaquenetta, confesses his love to the unimpressed girl, and soliloquizes afterward on the great men of the past who had been in love. To Hercules and Samson, he adds one more, saying:

> … yet was Solomon so seduced,
> and he had a very good wit.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 172-73

The biblical writers felt that Solomon's numerous wives seduced him away from perfect love of God. "And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:3-4).

> … the Duke Alencon's…

The Princess arrives and she has with her, symmetrically enough, three ladies: Maria, Catherine, and Rosaline.

The symmetry proves even neater when each of the ladies evinces an interest in one of the King's followers, each different lady with a different man. What's more, each has met her man before. With Maria it's Longaville, with Katherine it's Dumaine, and with Rosaline it's Berowne. Thus, Katherine says of Dumaine:

> I saw him at the Duke Alencon's once;
> And much too little of that good I saw

—Act II, scene i, lines 61-62

If we stick to the time of Henry of Navarre, there was a Duc d'Alencon who was well known to the English of the time. He was the fourth and youngest of the four sons of Henry II, and he had watched his three older brothers become kings of France, one after the other: Francis II, Charles IX, and Henry III. He died in 1584, while his brother Henry was reigning.

Alencon was known to the English as a persistent wooer of Queen Elizabeth I, which was rather pathetic, for Alencon was quite worthless and Elizabeth (one of the most remarkable women in history) could not have endured him an hour. However, Elizabeth was incapable of a clear no at any tune, but had a genius for temporization, so that the poor simpleton pursued the golden prize uselessly from 1579 to 1582.

… in Brabant once

When the King and his followers arrive to receive the ladies, the men are as intrigued by the women as vice versa, and, as luck would have it, each man is interested in the particular woman who is interested in him.

It works out beautifully, for Berowne (the wittiest of the men) is at once involved with Rosaline (the wittiest of the women), and, eager to break the ice, he uses a device not unknown today, when he says to her:

Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?

—Act II, scene i, line 114

Brabant was a duchy located in what is now central Belgium. In the time of Shakespeare it was part of the Spanish dominion in what was then known as the Spanish Netherlands.

As it turns out, the two had indeed danced together in Brabant, and there follows a typical Shakespearean game of wordplay.

… Charles his father

There is some business to be done, of course-the matter of Aquitaine. The King of Navarre does not wish to return it to France until he is paid a sum that the King of France owes him for expenses

incurred by Navarre's father. The Princess, however, claims payment has already been made and orders her male attendant, Boyet, to produce the receipts, saying:

> Boyet, you can produce acquittances
> For such a sum from special officers
> Of Charles his father.

—Act II, scene i, lines 160-62

The father of the real Henry of Navarre was not named Charles. His name was Anthony, Duc de Vendome.

On the other hand, Henry of Navarre had an uncle, the younger brother of his father, who *was* a Charles. He was Charles de Bourbon and was a cardinal. He was a Catholic, of course, and the next in line for the throne after Henry of Navarre, if the latter died without surviving sons. Indeed, when Henry III was assassinated in 1589 and Henry of Navarre declared himself the new king as Henry IV, the intransigent Catholics proclaimed Charles instead and called him Charles X. However, Charles was already in his middle sixties and he died in 1590.

There were other Charleses too in the Bourbon ancestry. The most famous Bourbon of all, prior to Henry of Navarre himself, was Charles, Duc de Bourbon and Constable of France. He was made Constable (that is, commander of the armies) in 1515 under King Francis I, but achieved his greatest fame by quarreling with the King and defecting to the national enemy, the Emperor Charles V (see page II-747) in 1523. The Constable died, while still fighting against his King, in 1527, sixty years before his distant cousin, Henry of Navarre, succeeded to the throne.

> … Dan Cupid

The receipts the Princess speaks of are not actually on hand. They are on the way, however, and must be waited for.

This means that business can be temporarily forgotten and the gentlemen and ladies can continue their business of pairing off and indulging in their wit duels. Berowne is particularly chagrined at finding himself in love and at being beaten by:

> This senior-junior, giant-dwarf, Dan Cupid,

—Act III, scene i, line 182

The term "Dan Cupid" does not signify that Cupid's first name was conceived to be Daniel. Rather, it means "Lord Cupid." The Latin word for "Lord" is *Domitius.* This is shortened to "Don" by the Spaniards and, in turn, distorted to "Dan" by the English.

In his disgust, Berowne inveighs against women and tries, but fails, to dismiss them with hard words. He even scouts their morality, saying:

> … by heaven, one that will do the deed,
> Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard!

—Act III, scene i, lines 200-1

The reference is to Argus Panoptes ("all eyes"), who had a hundred eyes set all over his body. At any given moment only fifty of them slept, so that there were always fifty awake. Juno set Argus to watching Io, the illicit love of her straying husband, Jupiter.

The only way Jupiter could rescue Io (in heifer's disguise at the time) was to send Mercury to tell Argus a droning tale that put all hundred eyes to sleep at once. Mercury then killed him and all Juno could do was save the hundred eyes and put them in the tail of the peacock, a bird sacred to her.

> … king Cophetua..,

Berowne, despite his brave words, finds that love drives him to write a letter to Rosaline (strictly against the King's rules) and to have it delivered to her secretly by Costard the clown. Armado, however, is also using Costard as delivery boy, sending a letter by way of the clown to Jaquenetta.

When Costard tries to deliver the letter to Rosaline, the Princess seizes it and behold, it turns out to be Armado's letter. She opens it and finds that the Spaniard is writing most grandiloquently to the peasant girl. He makes comparisons that are flattering to himself, if little likely to delight the girl, for he says:

> The magnanimous and most illustrate
> king Cophetua set eye upon the pernicious
> and indubitate beggar Zenelophon,

—Act IV, scene i, lines 65-68

King Cophetua, the hero of a ballad, was a completely fictional personage. He was an immensely rich king of Africa who disdained all womankind till he accidentally saw a beggar maid from his window. He had to have her, married her, and lived with her long and happily. The name given the beggar maid may have been Penelope to begin with. It varies from version to version of the story, however, and Zenelophon is a name as good as another.

As evidence for the very popular thesis that "love conquers all," the ballad grew famous and was particularly close to the hearts of any girl that dreamed of marrying above her station someday.

It is impossible to help but notice now and then that Armado is extraordinarily like Don Quixote in his consistent overestimate of himself and in Ms insistence on imagining himself a superhuman storybook hero. He ends the letter with some doggerel which begins:

> Thus dost thou hear the Nemean lion roar
> 'Gainst thee, thou lamb …

—Act IV, scene i, lines 90-91

Armado represents himself as the Nemean lion (see page I-58) while Jaquenetta is the lamb. (And remember that Don Quixote tried to fight a lion in the cage and called himself, in consequence, "Knight of the Lions.")

There is something rather pleasant in the thought that Shakespeare might be borrowing from Miguel de Cervantes, the Spanish author of the Don Quixote saga, since Cervantes was almost an exact contemporary of Shakespeare's (the former was three years younger and both died in the same year) and by all odds one of the few writers, on the basis of *Don Quixote* alone, worthy of being mentioned in the same breath with Shakespeare.

There is only one catch, but that is a fatal one. The first part of *Don Quixote* was published in 1605, a dozen years at least *after Love's Labor's Lost* was written.

When the Princess wonders about the identity of the man who wrote the unintentionally amusing letter, Boyet tells her he is:

> A phantasime, a Monarcho, and one that makes sport

To the prince and his book-mates.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 101-2

A "phantasime" is a man with a wild imagination (fantasy), and Monarcho was a harmless Italian madman who was tolerated at Elizabeth's court because he was found to be amusing, and who had died perhaps ten years before the play was written.

One can't help remembering that in the second part of *Don Quixote,* published in 1615, there is a long section in which the mad knight is humored by a kindly Duke and Duchess who keep him at their estate for the fun he affords them.

Could it be in reverse? Could Cervantes have come across *Love's Labor's Lost* and turned a small suggestion into a towering work of genius? I have never seen this stated even as a conjecture but I can't help wondering.

… King Pepin of France …

Boyet playfully rallies Rosaline on the letter Berowne has sent her, a letter she hasn't seen yet because of Costard's mix-up. She counters with:

Shall I come upon thee
with an old saying that was a man when
King Pepin of France was a little boy…

—Act IV, scene i, lines 121-23

King Pepin (see page I-455) reigned in France in the eighth century, over eight hundred years before Shakespeare's time, and he was apparently considered the epitome of the dead-and-gone in French idiom.

Dictynna …

The next scene introduces Holofernes, a most unbearable pedant, whose speech consists half of Latin and who spends all his time nit-picking the English language. He is a satire on what learning can come

to if it is carried to extremes without even a modicum of good sense to go along with all the education.

Those who look for personal satire in *Love's Labor's Lost* suspect Holofernes to represent a gibe against John Florio, the London-born son of a Protestant refugee from Italy. Florio was a linguist who spent his life translating foreign works into English, notably Montaigne's *Essays,* and who compiled Italian-English dictionaries, collections of proverbs, grammars, etc. He was intensely learned and was probably pedantic enough to make it seem that Holofernes was a satiric reference to him.

Another possibility is Thomas Harriot, an English mathematician who was Raleigh's scientific adviser on an expedition to the New World (a position which would be alone sufficient to make him instant anathema to the Essex coterie, including Shakespeare). Harriot wrote a book on the voyage which was published in 1588 and which was pedantic enough, perhaps, to inspire the satire.

Holofernes is a pedant from his very name onward, for the name, though biblical, is not one that many would think of using. It occurs only in the apocryphal (but very popular) Book of Judith, accepted as canonical by the Catholics but by neither Jews nor Protestants. It deals with an invasion of Judea by an army of Assyrians under a general named Holofernes. The general was hoodwinked and assassinated by the Jewish heroine Judith, and as a villainous name it would scarcely be used except to signify someone who would find pleasure in obscure and unusual allusions.

Thus, Constable Dull tries to trap Holofernes with a riddle which he thinks is impossible to puzzle out-to wit, what was a month old when Cain was born, is still alive, but is not yet five weeks old. The answer is, of course, "the moon," since when it is four weeks old it starts all over again with another "new moon."

Holofernes knows the answer and gives it at once, but naturally would not dream of saying "the moon" or even using the more common classical terms such as "Diana," "Selene," "Artemis," or "Cynthia." Instead, he picks the most obscure allusion possible and says:

> Dictynna, good man Dull.
>
> —Act IV, scene ii, line 37

Dictynna was undoubtedly one of the many local names for the moon goddess which then had to be woven into the general body of myths worked out by the old Greek poets. It was said that one of the

companions of Diana, the goddess of the hunt, who was often considered a personification of the moon, was Britomartis, who hid from the unwanted love of King Minos of Crete. Britomartis finally threw herself into the sea in desperation and was rescued in a fisherman's net. Thereafter, she was given the name "Dictynna" from a Greek word for "net." Her association with Diana was used to explain the fact that Dictynna could be used as a personification of the moon.

Of course, Dull can make nothing of the answer and Holofernes has to explain it.

Again, he quotes a Latin line and falls into ecstasies over it, saying:

> Ah, good old Mantuan

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 95-96

Now, the greatest of all the Latin poets, Vergil, who wrote the *Aeneid,* was born near Mantua and was frequently referred to as "the Mantuan." A reader might be forgiven if he supposed at first that Holofernes was quoting from the *Aeneid* and rhapsodizing over Vergil.

He is not, however. He is referring to Battista Spagnoli, an obscure Italian Renaissance poet, who used "Mantuan" as his pen name.

> Ovidius Naso.. .

Jaquenetta brings Holofernes a poem delivered her by Costard and supposedly intended for her. It is the letter, however, written by Berowne in the form of an eloquent sonnet and intended for Rosaline. Jaquenetta can make nothing of its high-flown style.

Nathaniel the Curate, a humble admirer of Holofernes, is also present, and he reads it. Holofernes criticizes the reading at once, of course, and falls into admiration of the Roman poet Ovid (see page I-8). Quite irrelevantly, he makes use of the poet's name to make a ridiculous metaphor, saying:

> Ovidius Naso was the man;
> and why indeed "Naso" but for smelling out
> odoriferous flowers of fancy…

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 125-27

"Naso," you see comes from *nasus,* the Latin word for "nose."

… as mad as Ajax…

In another part of the park, Berowne is still trying to write love poetry and still berating himself for it, saying:

> By the Lord, this love is as mad as Ajax:
> it kills sheep; it kills me-I a sheep.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 6-7

This refers to the tragic death of Ajax in madness and frustration, killing sheep under the hallucinatory belief they are his enemies (see page I-110).

… critic Timon .,.

He hears someone coming and hides. It is the King, who reads aloud a lovesick sonnet to the Princess, then hides as Longaville comes in to read aloud a lovesick sonnet to Maria, then hides as Dumaine comes in to read aloud a lovesick sonnet to Katherine.

Each one is in love against their original intention and each moves in a simultaneous and symmetrical way. Each one in turn steps forward to announce his discovery of the next and then Berowne steps forward to berate them all in most hypocritical fashion considering his own activity. He affects to bemoan the conversion of serious scholars into moaning lovers and says:

> O me, with what strict patience have I sat,
> To see a king transformed to a gnat!
> To see great Hercules whipping a gig [top],
> And profound Solomon to tune a jig,
> And Nestor play at push-pin with the boys,
> And critic Timon laugh at idle toys!

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 164-69

The contrasts he cites are extreme ones. He pictures Hercules, the epitome of strength and heroism, and Solomon and Nestor, bywords for wisdom in Greek and Hebrew literature, respectively, engage in childish occupations. (This is like serious Navarrese scholars writing love poems.) As for "critic Timon," this is Timon the misanthrope concerning whom Shakespeare was to try to write a play, *Timon of Athens* (see page I-133) fifteen years later.

> … the school of night

But, of course, in the midst of Berowne's self-righteous scoldings, in come Jaquenetta and Costard with Berowne's letter, which they still don't understand. Berowne, to his chagrin and embarrassment, must admit that he too has been writing sonnets.

The others are very naturally quite anxious to turn the tables and they make unsparing (and, by our standards, unchivalrous) fun of Rosaline, who is Berowne's love. Rosaline is a brunet at a time when it was conventional to consider blondness beauty.

The King sneers at Rosaline's blackness (meaning her hair, of course, and not her skin). Loyally, Berowne insists that he considers blackness a sign of beauty, but the King says:

> O paradox! Black is the badge of hell,
> The hue of dungeons, and the school of night;

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 253-54

The phrase "school of night" is a puzzler. Some people think it is a misprint and that what is meant is that black is the "shade" of night.

On the other hand, some think "school" is what is really meant and that this is another of Shakespeare's partisan references. This may have referred to a group of amateur scholars who gathered together in a secret group to study the new astronomy that had arisen out of Copernicus' book in 1543, which held that the Earth moved round the sun and not vice versa.

Shakespeare never accepted this and, in fact, his view of science is always strictly conservative and medieval. The Copernican view was widely held to be against the Bible and religion, and therefore atheistic. The group of scholars would be, then, according to their enemies, a "school of night"; that is, one where devilish doctrines were taught.

Raleigh was supposed to patronize this wicked school, which, of

course, gave the Essex faction a handle with which to strike at him.

> … the true Promethean fire Berowne
> survives the teasing and launches
> into a long and eloquent defense of love.

Once again, he blames the King and the others for even trying to abolish love so that they might study undisturbed. Constant study will wither, while love will supply true inspiration. He says:

> From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
> They are the ground, the books, the academes,
> From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 301-3

The phrase "Promethean fire" harks back to Prometheus (the name means "forethought"), who was considered, in the Greek myths, to be one of the Titans, the race of divine beings who ruled the universe before Zeus and his relatives (the Olympians) won that rule by force.

In the war between the Titans and the Olympians, Prometheus foresaw that the latter would win and he was careful to avoid joining the other Titans or to do anything that would offend Zeus. He was therefore allowed to retain his freedom when the other Titans were condemned to Tartarus.

Nevertheless, Prometheus was still a Titan and he could not wholeheartedly be a friend of the Olympians. Recently created mankind did not have the secret of fire-which was deliberately withheld by Zeus. Prometheus therefore stole fire from the sun and brought it down to man.

Zeus punished Prometheus for this by chaining him to a crag in the Caucasus where an eagle (or a vulture) gnawed at his liver all day long. The liver regenerated at night so as to be ready for fresh torture the next day.

It is possible to consider Prometheus the embodiment of man's forethought or ingenuity-personified "inventiveness." The fire he brought man might be, symbolically, the light of insight and inspiration and that is what Berowne would mean by "the true Promethean fire."

Berowne's defense of love is in the tradition of courtly love that

was developed in southern France in the mid-twelfth century and was associated with the troubadours. Eleanor of Aquitaine (see page II-209) was one of the first great patrons of such notions.

Courtly love had little to do with real passion or with sex but rather presented love as a kind of game to amuse an idle aristocracy, a game which consisted of complex rules of behavior, of love poetry, of exchanges of wit, of idealization of women-of everything but actual contact.

So Berowne speaks in grandiloquent phrases of love as an act of heroic aspiring to idealized woman, saying:

> For valor, is not Love a Hercules,
> Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
> Subtle as Sphinx;

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 339-41

For his eleventh labor, Hercules had to obtain golden apples from the garden of the Hesperides. The Hesperides were three nymphs who were descendants of Hesperus, the evening star. The name is from the Greek word for "west," since the evening star is always visible in the west after sunset. The Hesperides are thus the individuals to whom the garden belongs, but Shakespeare takes it to be a region in which the garden is located. Of course, Hercules must climb the tree if he is to get the apples, and the valor consists of doing so despite the fact that it is guarded by a fearsome dragon.

The Sphinx, in Greek mythology, was a monster with the body of a lion and the head of a woman. It was most notable for propounding riddles (hence it was "subtle"), which it forced those it met to answer. It killed those who could not answer correctly. Oedipus, on his way to Thebes, was faced with the riddle "What has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has most?" Oedipus at once answered, "Man, for he crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two feet in youth, and needs a cane in old age." The Sphinx, in chagrin, killed herself.

Love's Labor's Lost is Shakespeare's tribute, then, to courtly love, and this speech is the clearest expression of it.

Berowne is convincing. The men decide to lay aside subterfuge, forget their resolutions, and woo the women.

> Priscian…

Meanwhile Nathaniel the Curate and Holofernes the Pedant are discussing Armado. Holofernes finds fault with Armado, particularly in his fantastic manner of speech (as though Holofernes himself were not infinitely worse). Nathaniel drinks in the other's every word (writing down particularly good ones in his notebook). Nathaniel even tries a little Latin of his own, which Holofernes immediately corrects, saying:

> Priscian a little scratched.

—Act V, scene i, lines 31-32

Priscian is the usual English name for Priscianus Caesariensis, a Latin grammarian at Constantinople about a.d. 500. His book on Latin grammar was the final authority through the Middle Ages, and it was common to say "to break Priscian's head" in characterizing any mistake in Latin. In this case the mistake is so minor (a single letter) that Holofernes is satisfied to say that Priscian was merely scratched.

> … honorificabilitudinitatibus

Armado, Moth, and Costard come onstage. Holofernes and the Spaniard are immediately involved in complicated badinage and Moth comments ironically at their ability to use long words and involved phrases. Costard, with equal irony, wonders why Armado, who is so familiar with long words, doesn't swallow the diminutive Moth. He says:

> / marvel thy master hath not eaten
> thee for a word; for thou art not so long
> by the head as honorificabilitudinitatibus.

—Act V, scene i, lines 42-44

This is the longest word in Shakespeare but it is not really used as a word, merely given as an example of a long word. It is Latin, of course, and is the ablative plural of a word meaning "honorableness." It has twenty-seven letters and is thought to be the longest word in Latin and, therefore, the longest word in English-at least in Shakespeare's. time. Nowadays, it is "antidisestablishmentarianism" which is usually cited as longest, with twenty-eight letters. (It means

the doctrine of opposition to the disestablishment of the Anglican Church and came into prominence in the nineteenth century.)

Actually, it is only those whose knowledge is limited to what are called the humanities who fall for this hoary old chestnut. In German, it is customary to run words together to make long compound words far longer than any in ordinary Latin or English. Since organic chemistry was almost entirely a German monopoly in the nineteenth century, the habit has persisted in naming organic chemicals, even in English. The intricate structure of organic chemicals requires an intricate naming system and there is, for instance, a chemical called "betadimethylaminobenzaldehyde," which is twenty-nine letters long and which is far from the longest possible.

> … the Nine Worthies

Apparently the King is planning an entertainment that evening for the Princess. He has consulted Armado on what it should consist of and he, in turn, consults Holofernes. Holofernes makes an instant decision:

> Sir, you shall present before her
> the Nine Worthies.

—Act V, scene i, lines 118-19

The Nine Worthies (see page II-401) are usually given as Hector, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey Bouillon.

Holofernes does not go by this standard list, apparently. He starts assigning the different worthies to the people present and after mentioning Joshua and Judas Maccabeus, he says:

> … this swain,
> because of his great limb or joint,
> shall pass Pompey the Great…

—Act V, scene i, lines 128-30

We can only suppose that Pompey the Great is substituted for Julius Caesar, and if this is so, it is a great mistake, for Caesar was far the greater man (see page I-257).

Saint Denis. ..

The last scene in *Love's Labor's Lost* is the longest in the play and, for that matter, in Shakespeare. It begins with the ladies coming together to talk about the fact that they have all received love tokens from the men. Boyet arrives to say he has overheard the men speaking and they have decided to woo the ladies in earnest.

The Princess says, lightly:

Saint Denis to Saint Cupid!

—Act V, scene ii, line 87

It is to be a merry war between the sexes in the tradition of courtly love. The men come to woo and the French ladies will resist. Saint Denis, the patron saint of France (see page II-515), will be opposed to the assaults of love, here represented as Saint Cupid.

Like Muscovites or Russians …

Boyet tells the ladies that the gentlemen will come to them in exotic costume, for they

… are apparelled thus-
Like Muscovites or Russians…

—Act V, scene ii, lines 120-21

In Shakespeare's time, Russians were exotic and popular in England because of Chancellor's voyage (see page I-640).

The ladies therefore decide to wear masks and to switch their characteristic ribboned decorations ("favors") with one another, so that each man might think the wrong girl his and court at cross-purposes. This is done and the ladies utterly thwart the men first when they are disguised as Russians and then in their own persons.

Berowne in particular is forced, in frustration, to forswear the complexities of courtly love, at which the ladies win every time, and vows to be an honest lover henceforward. He says:

Henceforth my wooing mind
shall be expressed
In russet yeas and honest kersey noes.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 413-16

Russet and kersey are the color and material of homemade peasant clothing and Shakespeare thus expresses (as he usually does in his plays) his opinion of the superiority of plain Englishness over foreign ways and customs.

Whose club killed Cerberus…

But it is time now for the masque of the Nine Worthies to be presented by the various eccentrics of the play.

Costard comes in with a sonorous Pompey the Great. Nathaniel is a hesitant and easily rattled Alexander the Great, and then in come Holofernes and Moth as Judas Maccabeus and Hercules respectively. Holofernes speaks first for Moth with the expected scraps of Latin, saying:

Great Hercules is presented by this imp
Whose club killed Cerberus, that three-headed canus;
And when he was a babe, a child, a shrimp,
Thus did he strangle serpents in his manus.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 586-89

The trite Latin rhyme of *canus* (dog) and *manus* (hand) reduces pedantry to its most foolish.

Hercules' twelfth and climactic labor was that of bringing into the upper world the three-headed hound Cerberus (see page I-101), who guarded the entrance to the underworld. He did not kill it, but brought it up alive as proof of the successful completion of the labor, then returned it.

When Hercules was a year old, according to legend, the jealous Juno (who was angry because Hercules was the offspring of one of Jupiter's many extramarital ventures) sent two serpents to kill him in the cradle. The infant Hercules seized each serpent in one of his baby fists and strangled it. The diminutive page is therefore not so ridiculous a representation of Hercules as might be thought. He represents Hercules, the Heroic Babe.

Dead…

The rest of the masque of the Nine Worthies is reduced to a shambles. Holofernes, trying to make the Judas Maccabeus speech for himself, is teased into silence. Armado, who comes next as Hector, can make no more headway.

Costard is urged on by Berowne to accuse Armado of making Jaquenetta pregnant, and for a minute the audience is made to think there will be a mock duel between the two, but all is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger. He comes with news of the Princess' father, the King of France. The Princess guesses at once:

> Dead, for my life!
>
> —Act V, scene ii, line 721

Henry III was stabbed on August 1, 1589, and died the next day. This may have nothing to do with the play at all, for there is a good chance it was written before then.

The French King's death, in the play, is a convenient device to end the developing and increasingly intense game of courtly love before it is forced to graduate into something else. The unreal world of the Navarrese court is forced to face reality, for the Princess must return to Paris to face the difficulties of a succession.

The men insist that though the game is over, their love is real. The ladies order them to remain austere, as they had originally planned to do, for one year anyway and if, at the end, they are still in love, that love will be returned.

And so love's labor is lost-for a year. Yet the audience may suppose that the year will pass and that love will then win.

15. The Taming Of The Shrew

The taming of the shrew, written, possibly, in 1593 or 1594, is a play within a play. At least it starts out so with what Shakespeare calls an "Induction" ("Introduction") representing the frame within which the play proper is presented.

> … Richard Conqueror

The Induction begins with Christopher Sly, more than half drunk, being thrown out of an alehouse by an irate landlady who demands money for the glasses he has broken; money he refuses to pay.

With the owlish gravity of drunkenness, he rejects the names she calls him. He says:

> … the Slys are no rogues.
> Look in the chronicles: we came in with Richard Conqueror.

—Induction, scene i, lines 3-4

Christopher Sly is, as he says later, a tinker, a profession lost to the modern world. A tinker was a solderer and repairer of kettles, pots, and other such household metalware, the name of the profession coming from the tink-tink of a small hammer against the utensil.

It did not take much capital or much intelligence to be a tinker, and while tinkers acted as though they were general handy men, they usually couldn't go much beyond solder or a nail, so that we now have the verb "to tinker," meaning "to fiddle with, rather unskillfully."

Tinkers could scarcely make a living if they sat in one place and waited for neighbors' kettles to come apart. They were usually itinerant, carrying their few tools on their backs and going from village to village. They were distrusted, as strangers usually are, and perhaps a number of them used the tinker's equipment only as a blind and were really beggars, or even smalltime thieves and con men. At any rate, tinkers were traditionally considered rascals and rogues.

Christopher Sly, then, being a tinker, and showing himself in costume and action to be an utter no-account, is amusing in claiming to be descended from one of the Norman barons who conquered England in the eleventh century.

What's more, Sly's amalgamation of William the Conqueror and

Richard the Lion-Hearted (the latter was the great-great-grandson of the former) helps the humor with the audience. Even the least sophisticated of the Elizabethans would surely catch the error.

… for Semiramis

Christopher Sly falls into a drunken slumber, just as a Lord and his hunt-tag party come on the scene. Finding Sly, it occurs to the Lord to play an elaborate practical joke. They are to take Sly, dress him in fine clothes, and, when he wakes, convince him that he is a great nobleman who for many years has been mad and thought himself a pauper.

This is done, and in the second scene of the Induction, Sly, awakening with a call for small beer, finds himself attended by a variety of obsequious servants who wait on him with the greatest tenderness and with a wealth of classical allusions. The Lord himself plays a role as servant and says respectfully:

> … wilt thou sleep? We'll have thee to a couch
> Softer and sweeter than the lustful bed
> On purpose trimmed up for Semiramis.

—Induction, scene ii, lines 37-39

Semiramis is the legendary Queen of Assyria who had become a byword, among the Greeks, for luxury (see page I-403).

Adonis painted…

Among other things, they offer Sly a choice of paintings dealing with mythological subjects. Thus, one servant says:

> … We will fetch thee straight
> Adonis painted by a running brook
> And Cytherea all in sedges hid,

—Induction, scene ii, lines 49-51

This refers to the myth of Venus and Adonis, concerning which Shakespeare had written a long poem a year or two before he wrote

this play (see page I-5).

Cytherea is an alternate name for Venus, derived from the fact that an important seat of her worship was the island of Cythera, just off the southeastern corner of Greece.

> We'll show thee Io. ..

The Lord offers a second choice:

> We'll show thee Io as she was a maid
> And how she was beguiled and surprised.

—Induction, scene ii, lines 54-55

Io was a daughter of the river god Inachus in the Greek myths, and Jupiter fell in love with her. The myth has nothing to say about how Io was "beguiled and surprised," though Jupiter used guile on other young ladies, notably Europa (see page I-44). The myth concentrates instead on the manner in which Jupiter's jealous wife, Juno, persecuted Io afterward (see page I-86).

> … Daphne roaming. ..

A third choice is presented:

> Or Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,
> Scratching her legs that one shall swear she bleeds,
> And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep,

—Induction, scene ii, lines 57-59

Daphne was a nymph sworn to virginity whom Apollo loved. She rejected his advances and fled from him when he tried to seize her. He pursued and would have caught her, but at the last minute, her mother, Gaea (the earth goddess), turned her into a laurel tree.

Little by little, then, Sly is convinced that after all he is a lord. He even begins to speak in blank verse instead of the usual prose. And to cap the climax, a play is presented for his edification, and it is this play which is what we usually think of as *The Taming of the Shrew*.

… fair Padua…

The play within a play opens with two young men, Lucentio and his servant Tranio, entering. Lucentio summarizes the situation:

> Tranio, since for the great desire 1 had
> To see fair Padua, nursery of arts,
> I am arrived for fruitful Lombardy,

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-3

Padua is a city in northeastern Italy a little over twenty miles west of Venice and noted for its university.

Medieval Italy was, in fact, famous for its universities, for learning had taken new root there while it was still all but dead in the countries beyond the Alps. The first medieval university was established in Bologna, eighty miles southwest of Venice, in 1088. It specialized in the study of Roman law and remained the great center of legal studies for centuries afterward.

Bologna had its quarrels and problems and, on occasion, its schisms. In 1222 a group of its professors and students broke away and established a competing university at Padua, and it was this which made that city the "nursery of arts." It, as well as Bologna, supported a great law school and the two were great rivals.

Padua was an independent city-state through the Middle Ages but in 1405 it was absorbed into the territory of the Venetian republic and was still part of it in Shakespeare's time (and remained so till 1797). Padua was not actually part of Lombardy in the medieval or modern sense. Lombardy is located in northwestern Italy with Milan as its chief city, and even at its closest approach, Lombardy is fifty miles west of Padua.

This, however, is not as bad as it sounds. In the eighth century all of northern Italy was under the control of the Lombards and the term might therefore be used in a poetic sense for northern Italy generally. (Nevertheless, Shakespeare may well have been a little hazy on the fine points of Italian geography. This shows up more clearly elsewhere.)

Pisa…

Lucentio has come to Padua for an education, but he pauses also

to announce his birthplace:

> Pisa, renowned for grave citizens,
> Gave me my being…

—Act I, scene i, lines 10-11

Pisa is located on the western coast of Italy, about 140 miles southwest of Padua. During the Middle Ages it was for a time a great commercial city, the rival of Genoa and Venice. It was at its height between 1050 and 1250, and in 1173 it built what is now its leading feature, a bell tower that, through some flaw in its foundation, settled out of the vertical. It is the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Toward the end of the thirteenth century Pisa was defeated in a long war with Genoa and began a steady decline. In 1406 it was captured by the forces of the city of Florence, forty-five miles to its east, and remained under Florentine domination through Shakespeare's time (and, indeed, until 1860). In fact, Lucentio describes himself as:

> Vincentio's son, brought up in Florence,

—Act I, scene i, line 14

Florence, the home city of Dante, was the very epitome of Renaissance culture. It was the Athens of Italy, and one would boast of being brought up there as one might boast of having been brought up in Athens in ancient times or in Paris in modern times.

> As Ovid …

Tranio is a little nervous at Lucentio's grandiloquent speech, for he views with some concern the prospect of a close course of study. He says:

> Let's be no stoics nor no stocks, I pray,
> Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
> As [to make] Ovid be an outcast quite abjured.

—Act I, scene i, lines 31-33

Tranio's distaste for Stoics (see page I-305) or for Aristotle (see page I-104) is not so puzzling in a merry young man.

As for Ovid, whom he prefers, his best-known work is his *Metamorphoses* (see page I-8). However, a more notorious piece of work was his *Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love),* which gave, in witty and amusing style, a course in seduction for young men.

Ovid insisted it was intended to deal only with the relations of young men and women of easy virtue, but it could easily be applied to anyone, of course, and the Emperor Augustus, a very moral man, was outraged at its publication. It was one of the reasons why Ovid was banished to a far corner of the Empire a few years later.

It is undoubtedly *The Art of Love* of which Tranio is thinking, and he is urging Lucentio not to be so wrapped up in his studies as to forget to have a little fun now and then.

… hear Minerva speak

Tranio need not have worried. Lucentio is, actually, all on the side of Ovid too, and something comes up at once to prove it.

A rich merchant of Padua, Baptista, comes on the scene with his two daughters, Katherina (or, for short, Kate) and Bianca. Trailing him are two other men also, the aged Gremio and the younger Hortensio.

Both Gremio and Hortensio are clamoring for the hand of Bianca, the younger daughter, a gentle girl, who stands with eyes cast down and rarely speaks. (Her very name means "white," as though to emphasize her color-lessness.)

Baptista will have none of this, however. He will not allow Bianca to marry until the elder sister, Kate, is married. The two suitors can have their chance at her. If one marries her the other may woo Bianca.

But it turns out at once that Kate is a furious shrew, whose every word is a threat, whose eyes flash fire, and who is ready at a moment's notice to commit mayhem. The two suitors climb over each other in an attempt to get away from her.

Tranio and Lucentio are watching from the sidelines. Tranio is amazed at the shrewishness of Kate, but Lucentio has eyes only for the gentle Bianca. When Bianca humbly accepts her father's delay of her marriage, Lucentio is ravished with her modest words. He says to Tranio:

Hark, Tranio, thou mayst hear Minerva speak.

—Act I, scene i, line 84

Minerva was the Roman goddess of wisdom (her very name may be related to *mens,* meaning "mind") and is the analogue of the Greek Athena.

> … love-in-idleness

Baptista and his daughters go off, but not till after the father mentions in passing that he is looking for a music teacher for Bianca.

Gremio and Hortensio look after them in chagrin and decide that the only way they can manage to pursue their suit of Bianca is to find some madman, somehow, who will be willing to marry Katherina. After all, Baptista is enormously rich, so that Katherina (considering her shrewishness and the difficulty of getting rid of her) would command a huge dowry.

They leave too, and Lucentio comes out of his wide-eyed trance to find himself deeply in love at first sight with Bianca. He says to Tranio:

> But see, while idly I stood looking on,
> I found the effect of love-in-idleness.

—Act I, scene i, lines 150-51

Love-in-idleness is the pansy, which was thought in Elizabethan nature folklore to have the effect of a love potion (see page I-34). Lucentio decides to be utterly frank about his feelings and plans, for he says to Tranio:

> Thou art to me as secret and as dear
> As Anna to the Queen of Carthage was,

—Act I, scene i, lines 153-54

Anna was the sister of Dido (see page I-20) and her confidante. Lucentio goes on to say:

> … / saw sweet beauty in her face,

Such as the daughter of Agenor had,
That made great Jove to humble him to her hand
When with his knees he kissed the Cretan strand.

—Act I, scene i, lines 166-70

Agenor was a mythical king of Tyre and his daughter was Europa, for whose sake Zeus (Jupiter, or Jove) turned himself into a bull and with her swam to Crete (see page I-44).

Love gives Lucentio an idea. He will impersonate a schoolmaster and get the post teaching Bianca. While he is doing this, his servant, Tranio, can pretend to be Lucentio, performing the educational and social tasks that the real Lucentio ought to be doing (and concerning which his father, Vincentio, back in Pisa, will expect to hear of now and then).

… Would 'twere done

At the end of the first scene, attention is suddenly drawn to Christopher Sly, the tinker, sitting in the balcony. He is dreadfully bored, but doesn't like to say so. When the page, who is pretending to be his wife, asks how he likes it, he says:

'Tis a very excellent piece of work, madam lady.
Would 'twere done!

—Act I, scene i, lines 252-53

But Christopher Sly is done, for we hear no more of him ever. From this point on, the play within a play is the play itself, while Christopher Sly, the Lord who fools him, and all the play-acting servants vanish from the scene.

It's possible that Shakespeare simply forgot about them. Shakespeare had, apparently, borrowed the device from an earlier anonymous play, *The Taming of a Shrew* ("a" rather than "the"), which used the play within a play technique. It may be, however, that Shakespeare got so interested in the play about the shrew that he grew impatient with the outer frame as merely serving to get in his way and dropped it.

Why, then, did he not go back and cross out the Induction and

these few lines at the end of the first scene? In this connection, we must take into account the legend that Shakespeare prided himself on never revising.

Another possibility is that Shakespeare did keep the frame but that the later parts were omitted by accident from the particular copy that survived and was used as the basis for the first collection of his plays.

Verona, for a while.. .

The second scene opens with the entrance of Petruchio, the hero of the play. He says:

Verona, for a while I take my leave
To see my friends in Padua. ..

—Act I, scene ii, lines 1-2

Verona is another city of northern Italy and is located some forty miles west of Padua. In Shakespeare's time, Verona, like Padua, was part of the Venetian republic.

… Florentius" love

Petruchio is accompanied by his servant, Grumio, and together they are on the doorstep of Hortensio's house, Hortensio being one of the friends Petruchio has come to see.

There is a contretemps at once, one designed to show that Petruchio is as great a shrew in his way as Katherina is in hers. He orders Grumio to knock at the gate, but Grumio takes him to mean to strike Petruchio himself, and refuses. There is a loud clamor, at which Hortensio opens the door.

Petruchio and Hortensio embrace each other and the former explains that he has come to Padua to seek his fortune. Hortensio at once has the notion of suggesting that Petruchio marry Katherina but, remembering her shrewishness, hesitates to play so foul a trick on a friend.

Petruchio, however, urges him on. He is after money and that is the only requirement he has. Aside from that:

Be she as foul as was Florentius' love,

As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrewd
As Socrates' Xanthippe or a worse,
She moves me not …

—Act I, scene ii, lines 68-71

Florentius is the name of a knight in *Confessio Amantis* by John Gower (see page I-181). The plot is one in which a knight is forced to marry a horrible old hag who has helped him in time of need and who requires the marriage as recompense. The reward to the knight for keeping his word is that the hag turns into a beautiful maiden after the marriage.

"Sibyl" is from the Greek *sibylla,* their name for a priestess attached to a shrine or temple who had the ability to utter prophecies. Such a woman would fall into real or pretended fits (which may have been drug-induced) and would utter incoherent sounds which a priest would then interpret in the form of carefully ambiguous sentences.

Sibyls were supposed to attain great ages, for after all, an old woman, with her great experience, might more plausibly be expected to have arcane knowledge than a young one. Besides, prior to the nineteenth century, births of common people were not registered and individuals who lived to their seventies were rare. A wrinkled old crone was an unusual and somewhat frightening sight and it was easy to believe she had strange powers (of a sibyl in ancient times, of a witch in later times) and had lived for a century and more.

A mythic explanation is that Sibylla, beloved by Apollo, offered to give herself to him in return for the gift of prophecy and for as many years of life as the grams of sand which she could hold in her hand. When Apollo granted the wish and Sibylla reneged on her own promise, the angry god pointed out that the girl had asked for years of life and not for youth and allowed her to grow older and older and older.

As for Xanthippe, she was Socrates' wife, and the tales told of her show her to have been a scolding shrew. To be sure, any impartial person would have to admit she had some justification, since Socrates neglected his family to wander about the market place, talking philosophy and teaching rich noblemen without pay, so that his family was always in want. Nevertheless, people aren't impartial. Since Socrates is thought of as the wisest of men and as a kind of pagan saint, Xanthippe is frowned upon for complaining.

Fair Leda's daughter.. .

The complications grow. Petruchio insists he will woo and win Katherina for her money, quite without regard for her shrewishness. Whereupon it occurs to Hortensio (as earlier it had occurred, independently, to Lucentio) to disguise himself as a teacher and be brought to the house under the patronage of Petruchio. If Petruchio offers to woo Katherina, surely the delighted Baptista will accept his protege for the post of teacher and Hortensio would then be on the inside track with Bianca.

At this point, though, in comes Gremio, with no one other than the disguised Lucentio. Gremio is going to sponsor the disguised Lucentio for the post of teacher, planning to have the man plead Gremio's cause with Bianca. Then in comes Tranio, in fancy clothes, disguised as his master, Lucentio. He too is heading for Baptista's house to woo Bianca.

When Gremio and Hortensio object, the disguised Tranio says grandly:

> Fair Leda's daughter had a thousand wooers;
> Then well one more may fair Bianca have.
> And so she shall. Lucentio shall make one,
> Though Paris came in hope to speed alone.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 243-46

Leda was a queen of Sparta with whom Jupiter fell in love. He visited her in the shape of a swan with the result that eventually Leda laid an egg, out of which Helen was hatched. Helen, as the very epitome of womanly beauty, naturally had many wooers (see page I-90), but was eventually snatched away by Paris.

There are thus four men now after Bianca. There is 1) Gremio; 2) Hortensio, soon to be disguised as a teacher; 3) Lucentio, already disguised as a teacher; and 4) Tranio, disguised as Lucentio.

All understand though mat everything depends on how Petruchio fares with Katherina, and Gremio says, gloomily, that that task is liable to be harder than Hercules' twelve labors put together.

> … dance barefoot.. .

In Baptista's house, meanwhile, Katherina the Shrew is cruelly baiting her younger sister, Bianca, whose hands she has bound. Katherina is demanding to know which of Bianca's many suitors the younger girl likes best, and one may easily suppose that Kate is

annoyed at the ease with which Bianca gains love, while she herself remains with no one.

This is made the clearer when Baptista comes in, rescues Bianca, and scolds Katherina. Katherina at once accuses Baptista of favoritism:

> Nay, now I see
> She is your treasure, she must have a husband;
> I must dance barefoot on her wedding day,
> And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.

—Act II, scene i, lines 31-34

To dance barefoot on the wedding day symbolizes the humiliation of an older unmarried sister on the occasion of a younger sister's marriage. Leading apes in hell is the traditional fate of women who die spinsters.

Shakespeare seems to be making it quite clear that Katherina is a girl who desperately wants love and who doesn't know how to go about getting it. She lacks the natural charm that is so often visible in a quiet, simpering girl, and the fascination that goes with a spirited temper is somewhat less obvious.

Shakespeare does not give us the early history of Katherina, but it is not difficult to suppose that her temper was nothing out of the ordinary till a younger sister came along. A quieter little girl, a younger, the baby of the family, would draw the attention of the father, and with every sign of favoritism, Kate would grow wilder in her indignation and Baptista would cling all the more closely to the little one.

There is no sign that Baptista is actually cruel to Kate, and he *is* trying to get her a husband, but he cannot conceal the fact that he likes Bianca better, so that the vicious cycle continues till Katherina is virtually mad for lack of love and in becoming so has made it impossible for herself to receive love even if it were offered-or almost impossible.

… in Mantua

Now the pack of suitors enters Baptista's house. Petruchio tackles his Hercules' labor at once, announcing himself in affable fashion, and stating that he has come to woo Katherina, of whose mild and sweet behavior he has heard a great deal. While Baptista stands there gasping at this novel description of his older daughter, Petruchio

blandly introduces Hortensio in disguise, urging his acceptance as a music teacher. Petruchio says of his disguised friend:

> His name is Litio, born in Mantua.

—Act II, scene i, line 60

Thus, another north Italian city is mentioned. Mantua is sixty miles southwest of Padua.

> … at Rheims…

Old Gremio has his ax to grind too. He wants his teacher (the disguised Lucentio) in the house for his own purposes (though he hasn't an inkling that his candidate for the post fully intends to double-cross him). Gremio introduces the disguised Lucentio under the name of Cambio.

Since the disguised Hortensio has been put forward as a specialist in music and mathematics, Gremio avoids those subjects in order to get his man hired as well. He introduces him, saying:

> … this young scholar that hath been long
> studying at Rheims-as cunning in Greek,
> Latin, and other languages, as the other
> in music and mathematics.

—Act II, scene i, lines 79-82

Rheims (Reims) is not an Italian, but a French city, and is located five hundred miles northwest of Padua. Its distance and its foreignness may serve to give the disguised Lucentio an exotic cachet that would be particularly valued in a teacher. Reims is chiefly noted for the fact that the kings of France were traditionally crowned there (see page II-539).

Tranio also introduces himself as Lucentio, thus (presumably) making it easier for the real Lucentio to avoid discovery and allowing a two-pronged attack on Bianca. The real Lucentio would win her love for his person, and Tranio, in the guise of Lucentio, would win her father's official permission.

… my super-dainty Kate

Meanwhile, Petruchio asks permission to woo Katherina at once, pleading haste. Hortensio, who has gone inside to teach the girls music, comes flying out with the lute broken over his head, thanks to Katherina's shrewish temper. Petruchio isn't fazed at all. As soon as Katherina enters, breathing fire, he is at her at once, insisting on calling her only by the familiar version of her name. He says:

> … you are called plain Kate,
> And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst.
> But, Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
> Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,
> For dainties are all Kates…

—Act II, scene i, lines 185-89

In Shakespeare's time "cates" were delicacies, luxury foods, and, of course, Petruchio is playing the pun for all it is worth.

… a second Grissel

Katherina hears herself praised in a fashion she has never experienced before, but, alas, she cannot accept it. Nothing will convince her that she is not being ridiculed, so she fights it off, in the old, old way, making it impossible for herself to receive what she most longs to receive.

But Petruchio is patient, and when after a long battle of wits, she is no less shrewish than she was at the beginning, he simply praises her to her father and announces success. He says to Baptista:

> … she's not froward but modest as the dove.
> She is not hot but temperate as the morn;
> For patience she will prove a second Grissel
> And Roman Lucrece for her chastity.
> And to conclude, we have 'greed so well together
> That upon Sunday is the wedding day.

—Act II, scene i, lines 286-91

Grissel is a variant form of Griselda, the heroine of the last tale in Boccaccio's *Decameron,* a tale picked up by Chaucer and included in his *Canterbury Tales.* The tale is of an Italian nobleman who marries a beautiful and virtuous lowborn maiden named Griselda, whom he proceeds to test. He pretends to kill the two children she bears him, pretends to tire of her and marry a younger woman, and so on. Through a set of unbelievable trials, Griselda remains unbelievably patient and is finally rewarded by being restored to her own in full with her children about her. Griselda has ever since been a byword for patience.

Lucrece is Shakespeare's favorite pattern of chastity (see page I-205).

… unto Venice

Katherina protests vociferously against the notion of marriage and those who hear this are amused. Petruchio is, however, perfectly calm. Ignoring Kate's shrewish anger, he says:

… I will unto Venice
To buy apparel 'gainst the wedding day.

—Act II, scene i, lines 307-8

Venice was the richest of the Italian cities. As a great trading center, it was bound to have merchandise from all over the world and therefore a wonderful selection of clothes.

… "supposed Vincentio"

With Katherina taken care of, Bianca must be disposed of. Hortensio is still playing his role as teacher, which leaves Gremio and the disguised Tranio (playing the role of Lucentio) as two official suitors who happen to be on the spot. Baptista offers to give Bianca to whichever of these two can offer more.

The two start bidding. Since Tranio is not really bidding on his own, he can easily raise the other's bid every time until Gremio is forced out of the competition. On the other hand, Gremio controls his own wealth, whereas Tranio, pretending to be Lucentio, has nothing at all unless his father confirms the bid.

Baptista therefore says that Tranio (the supposed Lucentio) can have Bianca if his father will guarantee what Tranio has promised; otherwise Gremio can have her.

This leaves Tranio rather in a fix. Since he's not really Lucentio, he can't really deal with Lucentio's father, Vincentio. Well then, there will have to be still another imposture:

> I see no reason but supposed Lucentio
> Must get a father, called "supposed Vincentio."

—Act II, scene i, lines 400-1

Indoors, meanwhile, the disguised Lucentio and the disguised Hortensio are both teaching Bianca and actually whispering love messages in competition. It becomes clear that Bianca prefers Lucentio.

> To me she's married …

Petruchio now puts in his plan to tame Katherina. He is deliberately late for the wedding and when he does come, it is in an impossible costume. He was supposed to have gone to Venice for gorgeous clothing, but he arrives in old, unmatched clothes and riding a horse so old and sick it can barely move.

The gathered wedding guests are horrified. Surely he cannot mean to let Katherina see him so, let alone marry him so. But he says:

> Good sooth, even thus; therefore ha' done with words.
> To me she's married, not unto my clothes.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 116-17

It is the key to Petruchio's scheme. Katherina must accept him for whatever he is and even for whatever he pretends to be; but she must *accept.*

He continues his mad behavior at the wedding, which takes place offstage and which Gremio describes for the audience. Petruchio swears his acceptance of Katherina, strikes the priest, throws wine at the sexton, and kisses the bride with a sound like a cannon report.

Once they are back from the church, Petruchio announces he

must go away at once, with Katherina. All beg him to stay for the wedding feast. He refuses. Katherina begs. He still refuses.

Whereupon Katherina falls into a fury and orders the wedding feast to proceed. Petruchio agrees, but it must proceed without them. He seizes Katherina and says fiercely to the assembled guests:

> I will be master of what is mine own.
> She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
> My household stuff, my field, my barn,
> My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything,
> And here she stands. Touch her whoever dare.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 229-33

There is a glancing reference here to the tenth commandment, which begins "Thou shalt not covet" (see Exodus 21:17) and in listing the examples of objects belonging to a neighbor that must not be coveted, ends with "nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's."

There is a strong temptation for males watching the play to feel pleased with Petruchio at this point, but our better natures must assert themselves. This bald assertion of male superiority that treats women as commodities, as animals, as objects, is quite out of line with modern thinking.

It is quite common to excuse Shakespeare by saying that such male domination was taken for granted in Elizabethan society and that Shakespeare was just echoing his time-but Shakespeare does not take this attitude in any other play. Shakespeare's heroines are, if anything, wiser, more capable, and better than his heroes. We can reasonably assume, then, that Petruchio is doing more than merely express a common attitude toward women-this is all part of his plan and nothing deeper than that.

… in her own humor

Petruchio brings Katherina to his country house. He has been in a shrewish rage all the way, according to his servant, Grumio, who arrives there first. When Petruchio comes onstage, he continues to seem mad with passion. Kate can't rest, eat, or sleep for his yelling and discontent with everything.

This, however, merely continues the role he has been playing since the day of his wooing. The servants who know him aren't fooled.

One says:

> He kills her in her own humor.

—Act IV, scene i, line 174

And Petruchio himself, in a soliloquy, tells the audience:

> Thus have I politicly [calculatedly] begun my reign,
> And 'tis my hope to end successfully.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 182-83

Of course, Petruchio has the money for which he married Katherina. But he wants, we may suppose, a quiet, loving wife too, and it is for this he plans his course of action.

.. .the Art to Love

Meanwhile Lucentio's wooing progresses wonderfully well. In his guise as a schoolmaster teaching Latin, he says:

> / read that I profess, the Art to Love.

—Act IV, scene ii, line 8

This is Ovid's book which had been indirectly hinted at by Tranio at the very start of the play. The disguised Lucentio says he not only reads *The Art to Love,* he practices it, and Bianca demurely says she hopes he's good at it.

Hortensio, in his guise as Litio the music teacher, is outraged at Bianca's open preference for someone who seems a lowborn rascal, and abandons her, saying he will go marry a widow who has long been after him.

.. .as far as Rome

But while Bianca is accepting the real Lucentio, Tranio (the false

Lucentio) must find a false Vincentio to win over Bianca's father. At last an old Pedant who looks the part comes onstage and Tranio stops him and asks if he is traveling on. The Pedant says:

> … up farther and as far as Rome,
> And so to Tripoli if God lend me life.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 75-76

It is a longish journey he plans. It is 250 miles overland due south from Padua to Rome, and then 600 miles across the sea to Tripoli, which is on the north African coast.

When asked where he is from, he answers:

> Of Mantua.

—Act IV, scene ii, line 77

Mantua is sixty miles west of Padua, so that if he has come to Padua from Mantua on his way to Rome, he has gone at right angles to his proper course. But then, he may not have come directly from Mantua.

In any case, Tranio at once invents a proclamation in Padua, announcing death to all Mantuans in the city because of some high political quarrel, and offers to save the Pedant's life by allowing him to pose as a Pisan; that is, as Vincentio. The Pedant gratefully accepts.

> … perfect love

Katherina is slowly wearing down from lack of food and sleep. She is trying to beg food from Petruchio's servant, Grumio, saying that she is

> … starved for meat, giddy for lack of sleep,
> With oaths kept waking and with brawling fed.
> And that which spites me more than all these wants,
> He does it under name of perfect love.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 9-12

Surely, this is a key passage. He is wearing her down and forcing her to accept whatever she is offered, not out of cruelty, but in order to force her eventually to accept the one important thing-love.

It is precisely this which is hardest for her to accept, for, as she says, she is more annoyed at being offered love than at being denied food and sleep. And it is precisely love which she *must* accept.

> … what o'clock I say it is

For all her begging, though, Katherina continues to get no food. What's more, Petruchio promises her clothes but when the haberdasher and tailor arrive, he is utterly discontented with what they offer. Although Katherina cries out that she likes them, he will have none of them, and when Katherina protests, he calmly pretends she is agreeing with him.

They make ready to go to Padua and visit Katherina's father without new clothes, but in exactly what they are wearing. Petruchio casually says it is seven o'clock and Kate tells him, politely enough, that it is two. Whereupon Petruchio falls into a passion:

> 7 will not go today, and ere I do,
> It shall be what o'clock I say it is.

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 192-93

That is what Petruchio is after. He must train Katherina to accept as true whatever he says, however ridiculous it must seem to her.

> … moon or star …

The Pedant in the guise of old Vincentio goes through the matter of the dowry with old Baptista in very satisfactory fashion, and while the fathers are thus engaged, the real Lucentio makes ready to elope with Bianca.

Meanwhile Petruchio and Katherina (along with Hortensio) are on the road to Padua. Petruchio comments on the brightness of the moon. Katherina points out it is the sun. Whereupon Petruchio falls into a rage again, and says:

> Now by my mother's son, and that's myself,

It shall be moon or star or what 1 list,
Or ere I journey to your father's house.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 6-8

Finally Katherina breaks down and says, wearily:

Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon or sun or what you please.
And if you please to call it a rush-candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 12-15

Petruchio puts her through her paces, making her say first that the object in the sky is the moon, then the sun. When they meet an old man, he has Katherina greet him first as a young maiden and then apologize and greet him as an old man. Katherina follows the flicking of Petruchio's whip perfectly, accepting whatever he says as true.

And that prepares her to accept the one thing he has constantly been saying from the moment he met her-*that he loves her.*

Thus, by bending Katherina to his will, Petruchio has used a temporary brutality to force the girl to accept what most in the world she has longed to accept-the love of a man. Now, and now only, she can be content

… kiss me, Kate. ..

The old man that Petruchio and Katherina have met happens to be Vincentio, the *real* Vincentio, coming to Padua to see his son. Once he gets there, he goes nearly mad with frustration, for the Pedant claims *he* is Vincentio and Tranio claims he is Lucentio, so that the true Vincentio can't make himself believed.

He is saved only by the appearance of the real Lucentio, who is now married to Bianca. Baptista is a little annoyed at the ruse that has kept him from giving Bianca to Gremio, but the real Vincentio approves the match and the two fathers will now settle everything.

There is another wedding feast and when Katherina wants to join the happy throng, Petruchio says:

First kiss me, Kate, and we will.

—Act V, scene i, line 142

Katherina begins to object, for they are in the middle of the street in broad daylight. Petruchio, however, frowns, and Katherina hastily kisses him as nicely as you please. Petruchio says:

Is not this well? Come my sweet Kate.

—Act V, scene i, line 149

Of course, it is well. By the kiss, Katherina shows that she has accepted love. It is the triumph of Petruchio, a triumph for love and not for brutality, and Cole Porter did well to name his own musical version of the play *Kiss me, Kate.*

… she cannot come

At the wedding feast all is gay, and Petruchio, in perfect good humor now, has to withstand a number of quips about being married to a shrew. He waits till the women are gone and proposes a wager. The three newly married men, Lucentio, Hortensio, and himself, are each to send, separately, for their wives. The man with the most obedient wife wins a hundred crowns.

Lucentio sends first, in perfect confidence. The answer comes back by way of a servant:

Sir, my mistress sends you word
That she is busy and she cannot come.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 79-80

The widow whom Hortensio has married does even worse; for the word comes back:

She says you have some goodly jest in hand.
She will not come. She bids you come to her.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 91-92

It is not really surprising that sweet Bianca doesn't come. Why should she? She has spent her whole life being sweet Bianca, and simpering and exuding charm, for only one purpose-to catch a man (first her father, then her husband). Well, her catching days are over, at least for a while, and now she means to relax. Wouldn't anyone after a lifetime of work?

The same for the widow, doubly, since she has had to work a second time to catch a second husband.

/ command. ..

Lucentio in sending for his wife had told his servant to "bid your mistress." Hortensio, after Bianca's failure, had said "entreat" instead. Petruchio scorns all softness. He says:

Sirrah Grumio, go to your mistress;
say I command her come to me.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 95-96

And to everyone's surprise, she does come, in perfect obedience. And again, why not? She had not labored to win love. It had been Petruchio who had labored to give love, and she has every reason to be grateful.

At his command, Katherina goes back to bring in the other two wives, and the gentle Bianca, when she hears about the lost wager, says to Lucentio:

The more fool you for laying [betting] on my duty.

—Act V, scene ii, line 129

Who's the shrew now?

Petruchio orders Kate to deliver the women a long lecture on the duty they owe their husband and she does, saying in part:

/ am ashamed that women are so simple

To offer war where they should kneel for peace,

—Act V, scene ii, lines 161-62

It may seem that this final speech is one long irony and that what Katherina has learned has been to show a false acquiescence so that she can rule her husband by pretending to be ruled by him. (In the movie version with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, this interpretation is implied in the very last post-speech action.)

Yet it is not necessary to suppose this. It doesn't matter who "rules." Petruchio and Katherina are in love and as long as love exists, "ruler" and "ruled" lose their meaning. Petruchio looked only for money, and got love too. Katherina looked for nothing and got love. It is a completely happy ending.

16. The Two Gentlemen Of Verona

Of Shakespeare's early comedies, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* written about 1594, is perhaps the most forgettable. It is so weak, in fact, that some critics think it may have been written as early as 1590 or else that the version we now have is a mangled copy of the real play.

Shakespeare may have used as his source material for the play an unfinished romance, *Diana Enamorada,* written in Spanish by a Portugal-born poet, Jorge de Montemayor, in 1542. The only difficulty with that suggestion is that the romance was not translated into English until 1598, some four years after *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was written. We might speculate that Shakespeare saw the English translation in manuscript or that he saw the French translation, which had appeared in 1578.

Verona, where the play opens, is a city in north-central Italy. It is a favorite setting for Renaissance comedy and was briefly mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew* as the home town of Petruchio (see page I-451). It is also the home town of the two friends who are protagonists in this play.

> … young Leander …

The play opens with the two gentlemen of Verona on the scene. They are Valentine and Proteus. The latter name is significant. In Greek mythology, Proteus was an infinitely changeable sea deity (see page II-655), and much of the action in this play is produced by the changeable character of the Proteus we now meet.

Valentine and Proteus, it seems, are about to part. Valentine is setting off on his travels, for in Shakespeare's time, a period of travel in youth was considered an essential part of the education of a young man.

Proteus, however, prefers to remain at home in Verona, for he is in love with a young lady and will not leave her. Valentine teases Proteus, saying that the latter is so lovesick that even in praying, he will do so…

> … on some shallow story of deep love:
> How young Leander crossed the Hellespont.

—Act I, scene i, lines 21-22

The Hellespont (better known today as the Dardanelles) is a narrow strait, about forty miles long, separating Turkey and Greece, and it forms part of the waterway connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. At its narrowest it is only three fourths of a mile wide. On the European side in ancient times was the Greek city of Sestos, where a beautiful young girl, Hero, served as priestess of Aphrodite, according to a tale that was told in antiquity and that has never lost its popularity. On the Asian side, in the Greek city of Abydos, lived a handsome youth named Leander.

Hero and Leander met at a festival and fell instantly in love. Thereafter, every night Leander swam the Hellespont to be with Hero, guided by a light she placed in her window. One stormy night, the light was blown out and Leander lost his way and was drowned. When his dead body was washed ashore, the grief-stricken Hero plunged into the waters to her own death.

The tale is a favorite of Shakespeare's. He mentions it several times.

> To Milan…

But Valentine must leave and the two friends cannot talk long. Valentine says:

> Once more adieu!
> My father at the road
> Expects my coming, there to see me shipped.

—Act I, scene i, lines 53-54

Verona isn't a seaport, to be sure. It is sixty-five miles from the sea. Perhaps Valentine means to travel overland to Venice and take ship there; or to travel to the sea by way of the Adige River, on which Verona is located. That depends, of course, on where he is going, and he tells us quickly, for he says to Proteus:

> To Milan let me hear from thee by letters
> Of thy success in love. ..

—Act I, scene i, lines 57-58

But Milan is not a seaport either (it is seventy-five miles north of Genoa) and cannot be reached directly by sea. One has the vision of Valentine traveling sixty-five miles to Venice, taking ship all around Italy to Genoa, a voyage of about one thousand four hundred miles, and then traveling seventy-five miles overland to Milan.

This is scarcely necessary, since in actual fact Milan is only ninety miles due west of Verona over undoubtedly well-traveled roads. One can argue, of course, that there were ways of traveling from Verona to Milan by inland waterways, but it is much more likely that Shakespeare simply didn't bother checking his geography. Nor need he have really. The audience wouldn't care and the actual cities have nothing to do with the story. It might just as well have been London and Amsterdam with an appropriate sea voyage between.

> Attends the Emperor …

With Valentine gone, Proteus turns his attention to his love for Julia, who, it quickly turns out, returns his love fully and is coy only out of maidenly modesty (and, perhaps, design too, to make herself more dearly valued).

And yet Proteus' stay in Verona does not entirely please his father, Antonio, who wants *his* son educated too. He discusses the matter with Pan-thino, who is listed as his servant in the cast of characters, and Panthino is all in favor of sending Proteus on his travels. He says:

> / think your lordship is not ignorant
> How his companion, youthful Valentine,
> Attends the Emperor in his royal court.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 25-27

Through the most famous part of its history, in the fifteenth century, Milan was an independent duchy and the Duke of Milan was one of the best-known princes in Italy. There were two famous lines of these dukes, Visconti and Sforza, and indeed it is the Duke of Milan (unnamed) who is an important character in the play. Why, then, this reference to the Em-seror?

To be sure, Milan had an imperial past. In the fourth century it, rather than Rome, was the place of residence of the Roman emperors in the West, and it was from Milan, for instance, that the Roman

Emperor Constantine [issued his edict establishing official toleration of Christianity in 313.

More likely to have influenced Shakespeare's thinking, however, was the fact that in 1535 Milan lost its independence and became part of the wide-spreading dominions of Emperor Charles V (see page II-747). Shakespeare may have associated Milan with the Empire so thoroughly that he spoke of the Emperor when he meant to refer to the situation as it had been a century earlier and speak of the Duke. (Or else the term "Emperor" is just another fault in the mangled copy of the original play on which alone our present version is based.)

And so, impressed by Valentine's success at the court of Milan, Antonio decides to send his son, Proteus, there too, and Proteus, to his chagrin [for he has just learned of Julia's love for him), finds he must go.

Now begin the complications. In Milan Valentine has fallen deeply in love with Silvia, the daughter of the Duke of Milan. She is presented as a paragon of beauty and virtue. Also in love with her is Thurio, much inferior to Valentine in looks and character, but who the Duke has destined to be her husband. As for Silvia, there is soon no doubt it is Valentine she loves.

Into this triangle comes Proteus, who has taken an emotional leave of Julia and has exchanged rings with her as tokens of love. As soon as Proteus meets Silvia, however, he demonstrates his right to his name. He changes completely, falling in love with Silvia on the instant, forgetting his Julia, and at once planning to betray his friend.

Valentine intends to use a rope ladder to get to Silvia's window and lope with her. He confides this to Proteus, who promptly passes the information on to the Duke. The Duke therefore confronts Valentine, who is on his way to the elopement, and has no trouble at all in catching him out. In a rage, the Duke banishes Valentine from his court, leaving the field that much clearer for the perfidious Proteus.

… with a codpiece …

Meanwhile, Julia, left behind in Verona by Proteus, can endure her loneliness no longer. She determines to travel to Milan to see him, and to avoid the troubles that might come to an unattended maiden on a voyage such as that, she decides to dress like a man.

This is a convention used by Shakespeare in several of his plays (though first, chronologically, in this one), and to us it carries no conviction at all. The audience is invariably amused that the hero cannot see that under the male clothing a female lies barely concealed, and gains but a poor notion of the hero's powers of

observation. However, a convention is a convention (like the one in the movies whereby whenever two lovers in isolation begin a love duet, the sound of an orchestra appears out of nowhere). Besides, in Shakespeare's time female parts were played by boys, and to have a boy-Julia dress up like a man was much more convincing than to have a girl-Julia do so. In fact, it was when the boy-Julia was playing Julia as a girl that he may have been least convincing.

In this play, at any rate, Shakespeare does manage to point out some of the difficulties of trying to switch outward appearances. Julia's maid, Lu-cetta, who disapproves of her mistress' plan, asks coldly how to make the breeches, and when Julia tells her to make them any way she pleases, Lu-cetta answers:

> You must needs have them with a codpiece, madam,

—Act II, scene vii, line 53

A codpiece was a baglike affair, covering the opening in the front of the breeches. It was, in effect, a container for the penis and was quite fashionable in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There was a tendency to fill it out with stuffing of one sort or another, partly as protection, and partly to make the organ seem more prominent than it was (much in the way that ladies' brassieres are tampered with in our own times). They might also be decorated or prinked out for the same purpose.

Naturally, the maidenly Julia is shocked at the mention of the object, but Lucetta says:

> A round hose, madam, now's not worth a pin,
> Unless you have a codpiece to stick pins on.

—Act II, scene vii, lines 55-56

The reference to the codpiece as a pincushion is Lucetta's wry way of saying that Julia will have nothing inside to interfere with that use. It may also be a sardonic reference to men who use so much stuffing that pins may safely be stuck in it Despite Lucetta's discouragement, Julia remains firm in her determination to make the trip.

> … from Mantua…

Valentine, traveling sadly away from Milan, falls in with a group of outlaws in a forest through which he is passing. Valentine points out he has no money and pretends he has been banished for having killed a man in a duel.

The fact that he has no money spoils him as a victim; the fact that he has killed a man commends him as a comrade; and the fact that he is handsome seems to have an effect also. The Third Outlaw says:

> By the bare scalp of Robin Hood's fat friar,
> This fellow were a king for our wild faction!

—Act IV, scene i, lines 36-37

Any mention of outlaws would instantly remind an English audience of Robin Hood, and Shakespeare is usually very responsive to his audience. The "fat friar" is, of course, Friar Tuck, who scarcely needs further words to an American audience either.

The outlaws then introduce themselves to Valentine, for it seems that many of them are gentlemen who have been outlawed for some little prank or other which are common to hot-blooded young men of high birth. As the Second Outlaw says, in what seems to be an aggrieved tone, concerning his own outlawry:

> And I from Mantua, for a gentleman
> Who, in my mood, I stabbed unto the heart.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 50-51

Mantua was briefly mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew* as the home town of the Pedant (see page II-454). It is about twenty-five miles southwest of Verona and in Shakespeare's tune (and for nearly five centuries before) it was an independent duchy.

… at Pentecost

Meanwhile, Proteus continues to betray everyone in sight. Having abandoned Julia and having treated Valentine most despicably, he is now prepared to double-cross Thurio. Under the pretense of pushing the latter's suit with Silvia, Proteus woos her for himself, singing for her the lovely ballad "Who is Silvia?"

Julia, in her male disguise, has come in time to hear it and understands at once the extent of Proteus' duplicity. She also hears

Silvia nobly remain faithful to her Valentine and scorn Proteus as a traitor. Silvia urges Proteus to return to Julia (of whom she has apparently heard).

Silvia plans to flee from Milan and make her way to Valentine, wherever he is, while Julia decides to carry her plan one step further by attempting to gain employment with Proteus as his servant, under the name of Sebastian.

Proteus does indeed employ her and at once uses her as his go-between with Silvia. Sebastian and Silvia fall to discussing Julia, and Silvia wants to know how tall she is. Sebastian says:

> About my stature: for, at Pentecost,
> When all our pageants of delight were played,
> Our youth got me to play the woman's part,
> And I was trimmed in Madam Julia's gown,
> Which served me as fit, by all men's judgments
> As if the garment had been made for me.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 158-63

Pentecost was originally a Jewish harvest festival ("Shabuoth") celebrated seven weeks after Passover. (The Hebrew word means "weeks.") Its celebration came on the fiftieth day counting from the first day of Passover. For that reason it received the name Pentecost, which is from a Greek word meaning "fiftieth."

Pentecost gamed a special Christian significance because it was on that day, the first celebration after the crucifixion of Jesus, that the apostles received the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in Acts 2:1-4, it says: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Consequently, Pentecost remained an important Christian holiday and was celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter.

Easter and Pentecost were favored times for baptisms, but in England and other parts of northern Europe Pentecost was the more often used because it came in a warmer season of the year (late May or early June). Since the newly baptized generally wore white for a week to signify the new-washed purity of their souls, Pentecost is commonly called Whitsunday ("White Sunday") in England. Some speculate that this is really "Wit Sunday" ("Wisdom Sunday")

celebrating the time when spiritual wisdom rained down upon the apostles.

Naturally, Pentecost was a joyous holiday and was celebrated with dances, plays, and other outdoor amusements.

… Ariadne passioning

Julia describes her Pentecost role, saying:

… / did play a lamentable part.
Madam, 'twas Ariadne passioning
For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight,

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 166-68

Julia, in her guise as Sebastian, is thinking of herself, of course, for she is much in Ariadne's position (see page I-31).

… Silvia I give thee

But now the action speeds up bewilderingly.

Silvia flees Milan to seek for Valentine. Her father, the Duke, and also Thurio and Proteus leave in pursuit of her while Julia follows Proteus.

Silvia is captured by the outlaws and is rescued by Proteus, but she still refuses to listen to his protestations of love (which Valentine overhears, so that he learns the truth at last).

The desperate Proteus threatens rape and then, finally, Valentine confronts his false friend. After Valentine's tongue-lashing, Proteus tearfully repents and at once Valentine forgives him. Valentine does more than that, in fact. He says:

… that my love may appear plain and free,
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 82-83

Most critics find it utterly beyond the bounds of reason to suppose that Valentine should on an instant forgive an all-but-unforgivable falseness in his friend and then abandon his love to him as well-to say

nothing of the insult offered Silvia in treating her as though she were a sack of wheat to be bartered. Some suspect a corrupt text, an ill-remembered denouement, a cut version.

Any of these possibilities may be so for all we know, and yet it might also be argued that Shakespeare meant it exactly as it stands. There is some reason to suspect that Shakespeare may have had homosexual tendencies (see page I-4), but there are no outright homosexuals in his plays except for Patroclus in *Troilus and Cressida* (see page I-98), and that was enforced by the Greek tale. Nevertheless, there are a number of cases in the romances in which friendship between males is suspiciously close and in which the language used between them is suspiciously ardent. The case of Valentine and Proteus is one of them and it is just possible to argue that Shakespeare was trying to maintain that affection between males was a higher and stronger emotion than that between the opposite sexes.

When Proteus gives up Silvia after being reproached by Valentine and then asks forgiveness, he is implicitly abandoning the lesser love (female) for the greater (male), and what can Valentine do but reciprocate and hand the lesser love back?

Fortunately for heterosexual sensibilities, this does not happen. When Valentine makes his offer, "Sebastian" swoons. Her true identity is discovered and the repentant Proteus is thus reunited with his ever true Julia.

The Duke and Thurio are also captured by the outlaws and Thurio shows himself to be a coward, while Valentine's bravery is conspicuous. The Duke of Milan therefore consents to have Valentine marry Silvia. Even the outlaws are forgiven and are taken into the employ of the Duke. All is happy as the curtain descends.

17. The Tragedy of Romeo And Juliet

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare dramatized a love tale that was well known and much wept over by young people before his time. The nub of the tale, that of two young lovers unnecessarily dying for love through misunderstandings and family feuding, is not a very difficult thing to invent, and examples date back to ancient times.

The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, for instance, which Shakespeare burlesques in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see page I-48), has such a plot. Indeed, both *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were written at about the same time (1595 probably) and there are some who suggest that in the version of the Pyramus and Thisbe legend presented by the Athenian laborers, Shakespeare was deliberately satirizing his own just-completed *Romeo and Juliet.* (For myself, I find this difficult to believe.)

The first version of a plot which is specifically that of *Romeo and Juliet* appeared in a collection of romances, *Il Novellino* published in Italian in 1476 by Masuccio Salernitano. It was adapted and, in the process, made into something considerably closer to the Shakespearean version (down to the names of the characters) by Luigi da Porto *in* or about 1530.

The first important English version of the story was in the form of a long narrative poem, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet,* published in 1562 by the English translator Arthur Brooke. It was Brooke's poem that Shakespeare used as his direct source, following it quite closely, but adding (needless to say) master touches of his own.

In fair Verona.. .

The play opens with a "Chorus," who explains the subject matter, beginning:

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,

—Prologue, lines 1-3

Verona (see page I-451) is mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew* and is the place in which *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* opens. The city

first appears as the scene of the Romeo and Juliet story in Da Porto's version. The earlier Salernitano version placed the tale in Siena, 150 miles south of Verona.

The actual scene does not matter, of course. The play is not historical and it is not confined to any particular city. It could just as easily, with very minor modifications, have taken place in England, and in the contemporary musical *West Side Story* it is transferred, fairly intact, to the New York of today.

Nevertheless, if we consider Verona, we find that in the play it is treated as an independent principality, something which it was in history only between 1260 and 1387.

That period would well fit the vision of an Italian city split by the rivalry of internal factions led by competing noble families, whose enmity resulted in street fighting with private armies of retainers and sympathizers.

Most Italian cities of the time contained those who favored a strong and centralized secular government under the German Emperor (Ghibellines) and others who favored a congeries of independent city-states under the moral leadership of the Pope (Guelphs). Families lined up on this side or that and feuded in consequence, or sometimes they had feuds for other reasons and lined up on opposite sides in consequence.

In Florence, for instance, the most famous city of Renaissance Italy, there arose about 1300 a deadly feud between the two families of the Cerchi and the Donati. It began over some trivial incident but gradually each side drew to itself others, so that the Cerchi headed the "Bianca" (White) faction, which was Ghibelline, while the Donati headed the "Nera" (Black) faction, which was Guelf. The whole city was torn in two by them and for nearly half a century its history was determined by the ups and downs of what had begun as a family feud.

Shakespeare does not give the nature of the feud between the Veronese households, and there is no indication that it is political in nature.

… the house of Montague…

The play opens on a Sunday (from internal evidence), with two retainers of the Capulet faction coming onstage. They are indistinguishable from comic English servingmen (as are all Shakespeare's comic lower-class characters, regardless of the supposed nationality of the upper-class ones) and are given the most un-Italian names of Sampson and Gregory.

They boast to each other of their desperate bravery and Sampson says:

A dog of the house of Montague moves me.

—Act I, scene i, line 8

The Montagues are one of the feuding families, and the Capulets the other. In Da Porto's version, the two quarreling households of Verona are given the names of Montecchi and Capelletti, but for English audiences the very similar Montague and Capulet would be more congenial to the ear.

Put up your swords …

The two Capulet retainers deliberately provoke two others of the Montague faction who enter later. The Montague retainers are ready to be provoked and there is suddenly swordplay.

One of the leaders of the Montagues, Benvolio, enters now and runs forward, anxious to stop the proceedings. He cries out:

Part, fools!
Put up your swords. You know not what you do.

—Act I, scene i, lines 66-67

Throughout, Benvolio endeavors to make peace, to end the feud or at least to keep it blanketed. This is evident in his very name, which is Shakespeare's invention since the equivalent character in Brooke's poem is not named. "Benvolio" means "good will."

Benvolio's attempt at conciliation is only one of several indications in the play that the family feud is dying. It is possible to argue that it could easily be ended altogether by some sensible and decisive act of placation on one side or the other. The fact that this does not happen adds to the eventual tragedy.

Turn thee, Benvolio …

Indeed, the chief reason that the feud is not ended appears immediately. Hard upon Benvolio's entry comes the evil genius of the play, Tybalt, of the house of Capulet. Furiously, he cries out to the peacemaking Benvolio:

What, art thou drawn among these heartless [cowardly] hinds?
Turn thee, Benvolio; look upon thy death.

—Act I, scene i, lines 68-69

Benvolio protests that he is merely using his sword to break up the fight and keep the peace, but Tybalt will have none of it:

What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.

—Act I, scene i, lines 72-73

This is the clearest expression in the play of the irrational psychology of all that is meant by "feuding." It is almost the only expression. It is Tybalt, the only irrational hater among the leaders of the factions, who prevents the triumph of reason.

In Da Porto's tale, the corresponding character is Thebaldo, but it is a happy stroke to change it to Tybalt. It brings on thoughts of the folk tale of "Reynard the Fox" (see page I-153), in which Tibert was the name of the cat. A common version of this was Tybalt, so that to the Elizabethan audience, the very use of the name at once brings up the picture of this particular Capulet as a quarrelsome and vicious tomcat.

Your lives shall pay…

The fight, forced on Benvolio by Tybalt, continues to expand. Other members of the faction arrive, including even Capulet and Montague themselves, the aged heads of the family (whose wives sternly refuse to let them fight), until finally the Prince of Verona himself appears on the scene.

He is, quite understandably, exasperated at this disorder in the streets. There have been three such incidents and his patience is at an end. He says, angrily:

// ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.

—Act I, scene i, lines 99-100

The name of the Prince is given as Escalus. No Veronese prince of that name is known, but, interestingly enough, Verona was ruled from 1227 to 1259 by Ezzelino da Romano. That may be no more than coincidence.

… Dian's wit

When the streets are cleared, Lady Montague expresses her relief that her son, Romeo, was not involved. It turns out that Romeo has taken to mooning sadly about in a fashion which, to Elizabethan audiences, marks the conventional symptoms of unrequited love. Romeo is no sooner spoken of than he appears in the guise of the romantic lover.

The older Montagues are puzzled by Romeo's behavior and Benvolio volunteers to discover the cause. The task is easy, for Romeo admits to unrequited love at once. Romeo says of the girl he loves:

She'll not be hit With Cupid's arrow.
She hath Dian's wit,

—Act I, scene i, lines 211-12

Romeo does not name her at this point and, indeed, she never appears in the play.

Romeo's moan is that the girl he loves insists on chastity. She has "Dian's wit" and Diana is the Roman goddess of the hunt (analogous to the Greek Artemis, a virgin goddess sworn to chastity).

Benvolio therefore gives Romeo the very sensible advice to find someone else, but Romeo rejects that advice scornfully. (It is the sad fact that whereas Benvolio is always sensible, Romeo is always romantic, and that too helps bring on the catastrophe.)

… to keep the peace

On the other side, Capulet is talking with Count Paris, a kinsman of Prince Escalus. Their talk at first is of the feud and here it seems quite obvious that there is little real interest in keeping it alive. Capulet says:

… 'tis not hard, I think,
For men so old as we [he and Montague] to keep the peace.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 2-3

Paris agrees and says:

Of honorable reckoning are you both,
And pity 'tis you lived at odds so long.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 4-5

What more do we need to see that only a face-saving formula is needed and the feud will be gladly abandoned.

… fourteen years

But Capulet has more on his mind than the peace, and so has Paris. Capulet has a lovely daughter and Paris would like to marry her. It would be a good match and Capulet is eager for it. He is held back by only one thought. Perhaps the girl is too young. He says:

My child is yet a stranger in the world,
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 8-9

He is speaking of Juliet, the heroine of the play, and as is stated and emphasized on several occasions, she is not quite fourteen! Her very name is a diminutive, for Juliet means "little Julia." (There was a Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* who was also a sweet and plucky girl of that city, though she could scarcely have been as young as Juliet.)

In Elizabethan times, of course, life went more quickly. Girls became marriageable more quickly, were made mothers more quickly, and died more quickly. Nevertheless, fourteen is rather young. Shakespeare does not bother giving the ages of any of the heroines of his other early plays; only in this one does he make an exception, and

for no obvious reason, he emphasizes it strenuously. -Perhaps there *is* a reason.

My fair niece Rosaline …

Circumstances now begin to complicate matters. Even while Capulet is talking to Paris, he is making preparations for a feast that very night. He gives the list of invited guests to a servant and tells him to go through Verona and invite them all.

But as the fates would have it, the servant who receives this order is illiterate and has no chance to explain that fact to the hasty Capulet.

And, as the fates would further have it, in come Romeo and Benvolio, still discussing the former's romantic love affair, and it is to Romeo that the servant applies for help in reading off the names of the invited guests. Romeo obliges and, included on the list are:

> Mercutio and his brother Valentine;
> Mine uncle Capulet, his wife and daughters;
> My fair niece Rosaline; Livia;
> Signior Valentio and his cousin Tybalt;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 69-72

It is Rosaline with whom Romeo is in love, and this means that Rosaline, as the niece of Capulet, is shown to be a member of the opposing faction.

Yet this does not seem to bother anybody at all. To be sure, Romeo has not mentioned her name; to do so would ill fit his mood of romantic melancholy. Yet he doesn't keep it entirely secret, either, for he has apparently imparted the identity of his loved one to Benvolio since the close of the first scene. Thus, Benvolio says to Romeo:

> At this same ancient feast of Capulet's
> Sups the fair Rosaline whom thou so lov'st;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 85-86

Can it be that Rosaline has turned down Romeo because of the feud between their families? There is no mention of any such thing. Romeo has stated that Rosaline has sworn herself to indiscriminate chastity.

Is there any sign of danger at all in this love affair of Romeo's that crosses the lines of the feud? No one makes any mention of it. Even

the cautious Benvolio does not seem to remark danger in it. In fact, Benvolio, still anxious to wean Romeo away from a useless love that makes him unhappy, advises him to attend the ball, saying:

> Go thither, and with unattainted eye
> Compare her face with some that I shall show,
> And I will make thee think thy swan a crow.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 88-90

So unimportant is the feud, in other words, that even the cautious Benvolio sees no danger in walking right into the center and hotbed of the Capulet faction.

> … Lammas Eve…

It is time to introduce Juliet now. Lady Capulet wishes to broach the subject of marriage to her, but with her also is Juliet's garrulous old Nurse, who had a daughter Juliet's age, for she says, referring to Juliet:

> Susan and she (God rest all Christian souls!)
> Were of an age.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 18-19

If the Nurse were to serve as surrogate breast feeder for Juliet, she would have to have had a child of her own shortly before. More important, this leads to talk of Juliet's age once more. The Nurse says:

> I'll lay fourteen of my teeth-
> And yet to my teen [sorrow] be it spoken, I have but four-
> She's not fourteen.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 12-14

The Nurse then launches into an irrelevant tale of Juliet's childhood that begins

… of all days in the year,
Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 16-17

Lammas Day is August 1. In early English times it was the day of a harvest festival, and the fruits of the field, symbolized by half loaves of bread, were consecrated at mass. The Anglo-Saxon term for half loaf was "hlaf-maesse" and this was distorted to "Lammas."

Earlier the Nurse had asked Lady Capulet how long it was to Lammas-tide and had been answered:

A fortnight and odd days.

—Act I, scene iii, line 15

We can therefore place the beginning of the play at about July 13. It is summer and the hot weather is referred to later in the play.

There must be some reason why Shakespeare harps so on Juliet's age.

… since the earthquake.. .

The Nurse has another way of dating Juliet's age, too, for she remembers the circumstances of the weaning. She says:

'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years;
And she was weaned…

—Act I, scene iii, lines 23-24

This verse has sometimes been given special significance, for in 1580 there was a notable earthquake felt in London. The argument is therefore presented that this was referred to at this point and that the play was consequently written in 1591. This seems awfully thin, however, and most critics do not accept the reasoning at all.

The garrulous Nurse is finally persuaded to be silent and Lady Capulet begins to talk Juliet into marriage. She takes the opportunity

at once to stymie any objections as to age, by saying:

> By my count,
> I was your mother much upon these years
> That you are now a maid.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 71-73

Apparently, then, Lady Capulet is herself some twenty-eight years old. Juliet, however, seems unmoved by the thoughts of marriage and Lady Capulet tells her that Paris will be at the banquet that night and she can look him over and decide whether she can love him.

> … 'tis no wit …

In the next scene it is later in the day and the Capulet feast will soon begin. In the street outside come Romeo and Benvolio, who plan to attend in masks.

This seems to give an impression that it is dangerous for the Montagues to invade the Capulet feast, but the presence of masks does not necessarily prove it. Masking at feasts was common and masked dances are featured in *Henry VIII* (see page II-761) and *Love's Labor's Lost* (see page I-440), for instance. Masks afforded young men and ladies a chance to flirt in semiconcealment.

To weaken the case for danger, Romeo does no more than wear a mask. He makes no attempt to disguise his voice, for instance, and is, in point of fact, readily recognized at the feast, as will soon be apparent.

To be sure, Romeo does express reservations about going. He says:

> …we mean well in going to this masque,
> But 'tis no wit to go.

—Act I, scene iv, lines 48-49

But when asked why, he can only say:

> / dreamt a dream tonight [last night].

—Act I, scene iv, line 50

If the feud were really alive and deadly, he could easily have said that it was "no wit to go" because discovery would mean death. To fall back on a dream, a mere presentiment of evil, shows how little importance Romeo attaches to the feud.

> … Queen Mab…

With Romeo and Benvolio is a friend, Mercutio, who is of neither faction and is friendly with both, for he has been invited to the feast. He is, it appears, a relative of Prince Escalus.

Mercutio is, in essence, Shakespeare's invention. Da Porto had a minor character named Marcuccio, but Shakespeare took that and touched it with his own special gold even down to the small change in the name. Mercutio suggests Mercury, the winged messenger of the gods, who flits through the air with superhuman speed. Mercutio is mercurial, with a flashing wit that never leaves him.

Mercutio does not seem to think of the feud as a deadly thing either. He makes no attempt to dissuade the Montagues from going, as he might well have done if there were real danger. Rather, he is intent on rallying Romeo out of his melancholy and is so anxious to have him come to the feast that he eagerly turns dream presentiments into nonsense by advancing his own theory on the origin of dreams as the product of a tricky elf. He says:

> O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
> She is the fairies' midwife, and she conies
> In shape no bigger than an agate stone

—Act I, scene iv, lines 53-55

Queen Mab is out of Celtic mythology. The pagan Irish had a goddess named Meadhbh, who was the ruler of a group of the "little people." This may have contributed to the notion of Queen Mab.

Queen Mab need not be considered a fairy queen in the sense that Titania was in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see page I-26). She is the fairies' "midwife"; that is, she helps men and women give birth to dreams, and this is no task for a queen.

Here, in all likelihood, "Queen" is used in its original sense of "woman" and to speak of "Queen Mab" would be something like

speaking of "Dame Mab" or "Mistress Mab." The word "queen" early split into two forms: one of them, "quean," degenerated to mean a degraded woman, a harlot; the other, "queen," rose to mean an elevated woman, the wife of a king. "Queen," in its ordinary original sense, neither depressed nor elevated, vanished altogether.

Mercutio's speech about Queen Mab presents the view that dreams are not messages of fate but the product of the routine thoughts of the day. Lovers dream of love, courtiers of curtsies, lawyers of fees; soldiers of war and drink, and so on. This is one of many examples of Shakespeare's modern-sounding rationalism.

Thus, when Romeo tries to stem the flow of Mercutio's brilliance and says:

> Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
> Thou talk'st of nothing.

—Act I, scene iv, lines 95-96

Mercutio answers at once, with stabbing relevance:

> True, I talk of dreams.

—Act I, scene iv, line 96

> … a Montague, our foe

Within the mansion the feast is in full progress. The masked dancers are enjoying themselves and Romeo sees Juliet for the first time. He falls immediately and hopelessly in love and completely vindicates Benvolio's promise that Romeo had but to look at other women to forget Rosaline. Romeo says:

> Did my heart love till now:
> Forswear it, sight! For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

—Act I, scene v, lines 54-55

But his voice is overheard and instantly recognized-and by Tybalt, the *only* person of consequence in either faction who takes the feud

seriously. He flares into mad rage at once and is prepared to kill. He says:

> This, by his voice, should be a Montague.
> Fetch me my rapier, boy.

—Act I, scene v, lines 56-57

Capulet is at once aware that Tybalt is in a passion and demands the reason. Tybalt says:

> Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe,
> A villain.. .

—Act I, scene v, lines 63-64

Capulet is not moved in the slightest. He recognizes Romeo at once and says to Tybalt:

> … let him alone.
> 'A bears him like a portly [respectable] gentleman,
> And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
> To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.

—Act I, scene v, lines 67-70

Surely the feud is as good as dead when the leader of one side can speak so of the son and heir of the leader of the other side. Capulet speaks so highly of Romeo, in fact, that one could almost imagine that a prospective match between Montague's son and Capulet's daughter would be a capital way of ending the feud.

Then, when Tybalt objects to Capulet's tame endurance of the presence of a Montague, the old man isn't in the least shamed into taking a stronger stand. On the contrary, he turns savagely on Tybalt, crying:

> You are a saucy boy. Is't so, indeed?
> This trick may chance to scathe [harm] you.

-Act I, scene v, lines 85-86

Tybalt, trembling with frustrated rage, is forced to withdraw.

… my only hate

Meanwhile, Romeo has made his way to Juliet, who is as instantly struck with him as he by her. In fifteen lines he reaches the stage of kissing her. He must leave soon after and Juliet inquires his name of the Nurse. She finds out he is Romeo, the son of Montague, and says at once, dramatically:

My only love, sprung from my only hate!

—Act I, scene v, line 140

It turns out later in the play that she was particularly close to her cousin Tybalt. We can imagine, without too much trouble, young Juliet listening with awe and admiration to the tales told her by her paranoid cousin; of fights with the Montagues, of their disgraceful defeats and treacherous victories. Tybalt would surely have poured into her ears all the sick preoccupation with the feud that filled his own wrathful heart.

And she would have absorbed it all. That may well be the point of Shakespeare's stressing Juliet's extreme youth. She was young enough to absorb the feud in its full romanticism without any admixture of disillusionment that would have come with experience.

… King Cophetua. ..

Although Romeo has left the feast, he cannot really leave. He must have another sight of Juliet if he can. Slipping away from his companions, he climbs the wall bounding the Capulet estate and finds himself in the orchard.

Benvolio and Mercutio come seeking him, and Mercutio in mockery calls after him with all the cliches of lovers' tales. He asks of the hiding Romeo just one word about Venus or Cupid as a sign of his whereabouts, defining Cupid, ironically, as:

… he that shot so true

When King Cophetua loved the beggar maid!

—Act II, scene i, lines 13-14

This is another reference (see page I-431) to the famous tale of the happy love of a socially ill-assorted couple.

But Romeo remains in hiding, and Benvolio and Mercutio shrug and leave. Surely if the feud were alive and dangerous, they would never have left Romeo alone in the very center of enemy territory. Instead, they seem not a bit concerned.

… refuse thy name

Romeo's patience is rewarded, for Juliet (as lovesick as he) comes out on her balcony to sigh romantically.

Romeo, spying her, indulges in a long soliloquy in which he praises her beauty in the most extravagant terms, but never once mentions the fact that she is a Capulet. It does not seem to concern him that she is of the opposing faction any more than it concerned him that Rosaline was. But then, Romeo is not fourteen and he is old enough to know the feud is really on its last legs.

Not so Juliet. She speaks at last and all her talk is of the feud. She says:

O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 33-36

It is irritating in the extreme that the first line of this passage, taken by itself, is so often treated in popular quotation as though Juliet were saying "Where are you, Romeo?" and were looking for him. Not only does it show a pitiful ignorance of the meaning of the archaic word "wherefore," but it rums a key point in the plot development. "Wherefore" means "why," and Juliet is asking the absent Romeo why he is a Montague. Oh, if only he weren't.

All she can talk about is his name. She says:

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
Thou art thyself, though [you were] not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face. O, be some other name
Belonging to a man.
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 38-44

What can Romeo be thinking as he hears this? We might speculate that left to himself he might have approached his father and urged him to talk to Capulet, under a flag of truce if necessary, and try to arrange a reconciliating marriage. It is so easy to feel that this would work. Who but Tybalt shows any signs of anything but weariness with the feud, and he could be beaten into submission. To be sure, marriage had been spoken of with Paris, but nothing had yet been committed.

However, Romeo may well have recognized the romanticism of the young girl who feels the thrill of loving the family enemy; who loves the risk and danger and sadness of it; and perhaps he would not dream of throwing cold water on that feeling. So he makes himself known and dramatically denounces his name, saying:

I take thee at thy word.
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 49-51

Thus he commits himself to the full gamut of romantic folderol as seen through the eyes of a dramatic fourteen-year-old, and the catastrophe is under way.

… the place death…

Juliet is astonished at Romeo's sudden presence and makes the most of it in terms of the romantic version of the feud. She berates Romeo for having taken chances, saying:

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art, //
any of my kinsmen find thee here.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 63-65

Exaggeration, we might easily guess. To be sure, if Tybalt had made his appearance at this moment there would have been trouble. We can suspect, however, that if anyone but Tybalt had appeared, Romeo would have gotten away with nothing but some hard words. In fact, the subject of marriage might have been broached.

Is it possible that even Juliet considered the feud and its consequences only as an afterthought? Her first fear was that he might have hurt himself falling off the wall.

Romeo accepts Juliet's insistence on the danger of death, perhaps recognizing that it is part of his appeal to her and glad to take advantage of that. Still, he doesn't really seem to take it seriously, for he says:

Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords!

—Act II, scene ii, lines 71-72

With all that done, the two get down to the serious business of expressing their love.

Thy purpose marriage …

From words of love, they pass quickly to the thought of marriage. Juliet says:

// that thy bent of love be honorable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,

—Act II, scene ii, lines 143-45

If Romeo had had the rational plan of trying to work a marriage

settlement in an aboveboard fashion to the advantage of everyone, he abandons it. If romantic little Juliet wants secret messages, and clandestine word, and even an exciting forbidden marriage-then she shall have them.

The meeting comes to an end with Monday's dawn nearly upon the two. Romeo, thoroughly happy, says:

> Hence will I to my ghostly [spiritual] friar's close cell,
> His help to crave and my dear hap [good luck] to tell.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 188-89

With luck, the friar can arrange the secret marriage that Juliet longs for.

> … the powerful grace …

The scene shifts at once to the cell of Friar Laurence ("Fra Lorenzo" in Da Porto's version) early Monday morning. He is an alchemist as well as a friar and is gathering herbs in order to extract their juices for his experiments, saying:

> O, mickle [much] is the powerful grace that lies
> In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities;
> For naught so vile that on the earth doth live
> But to the earth some special good doth give;

—Act II, scene iii, lines 15-18

Here is expressed the medieval view that all creation is made for the express good of man; that everything on earth has some property that makes it valuable to man.

> … your households' rancor. ..

Romeo comes to the friar with his tale of love and Friar Laurence is more than a little confused at this sudden change from Rosaline to Juliet and clucks disapprovingly over the whole matter. He decides, however, to go along with the secret marriage for a clearly expressed reason; saying:

> In one respect I'll thy assistant be;

For this alliance may so happy prove
To turn your households' rancor to pure love.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 90-92

Friar Laurence obviously considers the feud to be dying and a marital alliance, he judges, will end it altogether. He seems, however, to prefer the indirect and hidden approach to the direct one; he is as romantic as Juliet.

… Prince of Cats. ..

It is broad day now and Benvolio and Mercutio have still not found Romeo. Meanwhile Tybalt, angered over the incident at the feast, has sent a formal challenge to Romeo. The two friends aren't worried, sure that Romeo can take care of himself. Mercutio thinks very little of Tybalt as a swordsman, characterizing him as

More than Prince of Cats.
O, he's the courageous captain of compliments.
He fights as you sing pricksong-keeps time, distance, and proportion…

—Act II, scene iv, lines 19-22

The "Prince of Cats" is a jeer at Tybalt's name, of course. The mockery is aimed at that favorite butt of Shakespeare's-the French or Italian way of doing things (in this case, scientific fencing) as opposed to the wholesome English fashion of simply dealing out good thwacks.

Laura, to his lady …

And now at last Romeo appears, and Mercutio fully expects him to begin again with his whining lovesickness. He mimics him in advance:

Now is he for the numbers that
Petrarch flowed in. Laura, to his lady,
was a kitchen wench…

—Act II, scene iv, lines 40-42

Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca in Italian) was an Italian poet whose work may be thought of as sparking the Renaissance. He was born in 1304 and in 1327 met a lady known to us as "Laura." Who she was in actuality is not certain.

Though he did much work in Latin, he is best known for his collection of Italian sonnets, odes, and other poems written between 1330 and 1360. These poems deal with his love for Laura, and through that love, deal with many other matters. Because of this, Petrarch and Laura are one of the great pairs of lovers of history, though the love may have been an ideal one only.

… you ratcatcher …

But how things have changed! Romeo is no longer a mewling wretch, but is lively and sparkling, quite ready to engage Mercutio in a game of wits and to give as good as he gets, so that the latter is delighted that Romeo is himself again.

The Nurse then comes on the scene. Mercutio is, with some difficulty, shoved offstage and Romeo tells her that all has been arranged for Friar Laurence to marry them that very afternoon. The Nurse goes off with the news and plans also to get Juliet a rope ladder that she can lower to Romeo that night, so that he might climb to her room and enjoy the fruits of love.

We might imagine that on the next day, once Juliet has had her romantic marriage and all it involves, Romeo will confront his father with the fact, and old Montague will in turn confront the Capulets. All, we hope, will be well-if only Romeo can stay out of trouble till then.

But it is still Monday afternoon, midsummer, and very hot. Tempers may be short and Benvolio (still promenading with Mercutio) feels it will be well to go in. With characteristic caution he wishes to avoid meeting an irritated Tybalt, brooding over the crashing of the party the night before.

Mercutio refuses to take this seriously.

At this point, however, in comes Tybalt, inquiring after Romeo. Mercutio baits hull while Benvolio anxiously tries to keep the whole matter under control.

But now Romeo enters, already married to Juliet, although no one knows it but bride, groom, and friar. Tybalt challenges him with an insult and Romeo, aware of their present relationship, of which Tybalt is not, patiently endures the insult and refuses to fight.

So far all is well. Romeo has done the sensible thing, even if it was not a particularly heroic one.

And now the secrecy, Juliet's romantic secrecy, does its fell work. If Mercutio had known of Romeo's marriage he would have understood and stood aside. He did not know and finds he cannot endure Romeo's tame acceptance of insult. If Romeo will accept the grace, Mercutio will wipe it out on his behalf. He cries out to Tybalt:

> Tybalt, you ratcatcher, will you walk?

—Act III, scene i, line 76

"Ratcatcher" is one more reference to Tybalt the cat, and Mercutio is inviting the other to walk to some quiet place where they may fight without interruption.

Tybalt hesitates. His quarrel is not with Mercutio. He asks Mercutio what he wants and the latter says, lightly:

> Good King of Cats,
> nothing but one of your nine lives,

—Act III, scene i, lines 78-79

It is an old fable that a cat has nine lives, and there is something to it. A cat is careful, sly, equipped with needlelike claws for a fight and soft pads for stealth. It can climb a tree and land on its feet when it falls. It will escape sure death for other animals eight times out of nine.

> … both your houses

All might still be well. Mercutio, we may well expect, is the better swordsman and will kill Tybalt. Mercutio is not a member of either faction and so is not included in the ban against street fighting. With Tybalt dead, the chief upholder of the feud will be gone. It will be all the easier to reconcile the factions.

All Romeo need do now is stand aside.

But Romeo cannot. Mercutio is his loved friend, Tybalt his new relative. He wants neither hurt so he tries to get between and stop

them. At which point, in one Sash, all goes wrong. Tybalt's sword passes under Romeo's arm and Mercutio is blocked from parrying. Badly wounded, Mercutio recognizes the fact that the quarrel was not really his, after all, and says so in a phrase that has entered the language:

> I am hurt.
> A plague o' both your houses.

—Act III, scene i, lines 91-92

> … fortune's fool

Mercutio makes his last bitter jests and hobbles off to die.

Yet still things are not utterly lost Romeo has lost a dear Mend but it was by no willing action of his own. He had tried for the best, endeavored to make peace. It was Tybalt who was the murderer and it is he who may be executed for it and again the feud will be made up the easier, perhaps, for Tybalt's end.

Yet Romeo cannot leave it at that, not even for Juliet. Mercutio died in his quarrel and he has no choice. Wildly, he challenges Tybalt and kills him-and by then all the noise has roused the citizens.

Romeo is half amazed at all that has happened in a matter of a few minutes, for now he must get out of the city at once or, by the Prince's decree, *he* will be executed.

It is *still* less than twenty-four hours since he met Juliet and already he has not only gained her, but lost her as well. No wonder he cries out in agony:

> O, I am fortune's fool!

—Act III, scene i, line 138

Yet a little chink of hope remains. When the Prince arrives, Benvolio tells the tale of what has happened with objective accuracy. Despite the clamors of the Capulet faction, the Prince believes Benvolio (and perhaps remembers that the dead Tybalt had killed his own kinsman) and does not place the death penalty on Romeo after all. He merely banishes him.

While banishment seems bad enough under the circumstances, a

sentence of banishment can be unsaid, while an execution is final.

… Phoebus' lodging…

Meanwhile, toward sunset, Juliet is waiting with unbearable impatience for the coming of night, of Romeo, of love. She says:

> Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
> Toward Phoebus' lodging! Such a wagoner
> As Phaeton would whip you to the west
> And bring in cloudy night immediately.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 1-4

The sun is pictured here in the fashion of the Greek myth, as a blazing chariot conducted by golden horses, traveling toward the west where they can move behind the horizon and rest till it is time for the next day's journey across the sky. The horizon is therefore Phoebus' (the god of the sun) place of lodging. Phaeton is the son of the sun god, whose ill-fated attempt to drive the horses of the sun chariot nearly led to disaster (see page II-297).

But then in comes the Nurse with the rope ladder-and with news, as well, of Tybalt's death.

Juliet is heartbroken, for she loved Tybalt. Her greater love for Romeo wins out, however, and she weeps over the rope ladder that was to have carried her husband to her, then goes to her room where she hopes to die.

But that is more than the Nurse can bear. She can still help. She assures Juliet she knows where Romeo is hiding and will get him to come to his wife and comfort her.

… pass to Mantua

Romeo, in Friar Laurence's cell, is completely broken. Overwhelmed with horror at the thought of banishment, he will not listen to the friar's consolation. Even when the Nurse comes, asking him to go to Juliet, he can think only of suicide.

It is only with the greatest difficulty that the friar finally manages to make him understand that banishment is not necessarily the end, saying:

> Go get thee to thy love, as was decreed,

Ascend her chamber, hence and comfort her.
But look thou stay not till the watch be set,
For then thou canst not pass to Mantua,
Where thou shalt live till we can find a time
To blaze [announce] your marriage, reconcile your friends,
Beg pardon of the Prince, and call thee back

—Act III, scene iii, lines 146-52

Mantua (see page I-454) is only twenty miles south of Verona, not really very far, though to Romeo it might well have seemed an infinite distance under the circumstances.

The chink of hope remains, but oh, how different from what it would have been if Mercutio had not been ignorant of Romeo's marriage.

For even that chink of hope to remain, however, time is needed as Friar Laurence says, and, alas, time disappears.

Thursday let it be…

Old Capulet is perturbed at Juliet's misery and attributes it entirely to the death of Tybalt. He says to Paris:

Look you, she loved her kinsman Tybalt dearly,

—Act III, scene iv, line 3

Yes indeed, and this is the best evidence we have that she may well have picked up her fatal notions of the feud from him.

Thinking to console his daughter, Capulet decides to let her marry Paris at once after all. He asks the day and Paris says:

Monday, my lord.

—Act III, scene iv, line 18

This fixes the time sequence for all the play. Capulet considers that and says:

Monday! Ha, ha! Well, Wednesday is too soon.
A [on] Thursday let it be …

—Act III, scene iv, lines 19-20

He doesn't know that Juliet is already married, of course.

No warmth, no breath …

Unsuspecting this new gruesome development, Juliet receives Romeo late Monday night. The night after their meeting and their great balcony scene, they spend in connubial love. At dawn on Tuesday they must separate and Romeo gets out of town safely.

But then Juliet learns of her prospective marriage to Paris and of course refuses firmly. Old Capulet promptly flies into a passion and makes it plain that she will marry Paris whether she wishes to or not.

Juliet can find no one to help her. Capulet threatens to disown her. Lady Capulet turns away. Even the Nurse, in desperation, can only advise Juliet to marry Paris and commit bigamy.

Juliet can think of no alternative but to fly to Friar Laurence.

At this point the friar might have shown courage. He might have gone to the Capulets with the truth and endeavored to protect himself and Juliet with his priestly robes. Under the circumstances, there would have been great risk, but there were no reasonable alternatives.

Friar Laurence turns to an unreasonable one. As romantic as Juliet, he tries a complicated plan of indirection. He gives Juliet a mysterious drug he has prepared himself. He tells her to take it the night of the next day (Wednesday) and it will put her into a cataleptic trance. He says:

… no pulse

Shall keep his native progress, but surcease;
No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest;

—Act IV, scene i, lines 96-98

This trance will last forty-two hours, that is, through Thursday and Friday. The Capulets, thinking she is dead, will place her in the family tomb. Romeo will be there by Friday night, and when she wakes he will carry her off to Mantua.

This drug is, of course, an element of fantasy, for no drug is known (even today) that can safely counterfeit death so accurately over so long a time.

… mandrakes torn out of the earth

For the first time in the play, there is a sizable gap in time. Some thirty-six hours are skipped over and it is Wednesday night. Juliet suddenly submits to her father's plans (to his relief and pleasure) and has now prepared herself, supposedly, for a wedding the next morning. She sends out the Nurse so that she may sleep alone, and as she prepares to take the friar's drug, she is beset with quite understandable fears.

What if it kills her? Or, worse still, what if it wears off too soon and she comes to in the tomb before Romeo is there to claim her? What if she is surrounded by the effluvium of death, the gibbering of ghosts, and, in general, by

> … loathsome smells,
> And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
> That living mortals, hearing them, run mad-

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 46-48

The mandrake is a herb with a large, fleshy root that is usually forked in such proportions as to give it a resemblance to a partly formed man. About this fancied resemblance a number of superstitions arose.

Since the root looked like a man it would, supposedly, help in the formation of one, and mandrakes were therefore thought to have the ability to make women fecund. This superstition (a worthless one, of course) is sanctioned by the Bible, where Jacob's second wife, Rachel, who is barren, begs for the mandrakes gathered by the son of his first wife, her sister Leah (Genesis 30:14).

It was also thought that because mandrakes looked like little men they ought to share some of the qualities of men-feel pain, for instance, and cry out if wounded. From this arose the tale that if a mandrake were uprooted, it would emit a bloodcurdling shriek-so horrible a shriek as to madden or even kill those who heard it.

Since mandrakes were desired for the ability to increase fecundity, and for other valuable properties assigned to them, it was necessary to pull them up anyway. What was sometimes done was to tie the top of the herb to a dog. From a distance, stones could be thrown at the dog, and in running away, he would pull out the mandrake, which could then be reclaimed.

… the infectious pestilence. ..

The first part of Friar Laurence's plan works well. Juliet does take the potion and falls into a cataleptic trance. In the midst of the preparations for the wedding on Thursday morning, the Nurse finds her apparently dead. Juliet is carried to the tomb with heartbreaking lamentation.

But there is another part of the plan. Romeo must be informed of all this and be ready to return to carry off Juliet on Friday. To carry this message to Romeo, Friar Laurence has sent off a friend, Friar John.

Romeo gets a message indeed, but it is from a servant of his who comes spurring hard from Verona with the tale that Juliet is dead and entombed. Romeo, stricken, has no thought but to reach Juliet's corpse and kill himself there. For the purpose he buys poison.

As for Friar John, however, he fails to reach Romeo. Before leaving he had sought the company of another friar, who had been visiting the sick, and both fell in with "searchers," that is, health officers, seeking to prevent spread of infection.

Friar John tells Friar Laurence that:

> … the searchers of the town,
> Suspecting that we both were in a house
> Where the infectious pestilence did reign,
> Sealed up the doors, and would not let us forth,

—Act V, scene ii, lines 8-11

He could neither leave town nor send the message. Friar Laurence, thunderstruck, now realizes he must hasten to the tomb so that Juliet will not waken alone and so that he can explain matters. Meanwhile, he sends another message.

The care of the "searchers" and their assiduity in applying quarantine is easily understood. In 1347 an "infectious pestilence" reached Europe. This was the infamous Black Death, the most frightening epidemic in world history. It is supposed to have killed some twenty-five million people in Europe in the space of three years, and quarantine was the only counter-measure the frightened continent knew.

Saint Francis…

On Friday all converge on the tomb. Paris arrives first to grieve over his lost bride. Then comes Romeo, intent on suicide. They fight and Paris is killed. Romeo then lays himself down next to Juliet, takes the poison, and dies. It is less than five days since he first laid eyes on his tragic love.

Only then does Friar Laurence finally come-a few minutes too late to prevent this further development of the catastrophe. He comes in muttering:

> Saint Francis be my speed [help]!
>
> —Act V, scene iii, line 121

St. Francis (Giovanni Francesco Bernardone) was born in Assisi in 1182, and after the usual life of a gay, but not particularly immoral, young man of the upper classes, he experienced a conversion to a saintly life. About 1202 he began to embrace a life of poverty and gathered disciples about him who were dedicated to preaching humbly and making their way through life by reliance on free-will offerings of the pious. This was the beginning of the Franciscan order. Presumably Friar Laurence belonged to it.

> … kill your joys with love

Friar Laurence finds Paris and Romeo both dead, and even as he tries to absorb this, Juliet wakes. The friar tries to persuade her to come with him so that he might bestow her in a nunnery, but with Romeo dead, she does not want to live and will not budge. The friar thinks he hears a noise and has one last chance at a boldness that might save the last pitiful remnant-Juliet's life. He misses that, too, and flees in fear of being discovered.

Left alone, Juliet kills herself with Romeo's dagger.

The watch, drawn by all the disturbance, now gathers, and so does the town: Montague, Capulet, the Prince. Little by little, the whole story comes out and the Prince sorrowfully states the moral:

> Where be these enemies? Capulet, Montague,
> See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
> That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.
> And I, for winking at your discords too,
> Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished.

—Act V, scene iii, lines 291-95

The mutual grief ends the feud; as it might, so easily, have ended days earlier in mutual joy.

18. The Merchant Of Venice

The merchant of venice, written in 1596 or 1597, lays its scene in what is surely one of the most remarkable cities in history. It is a city which at its peak was richer and more powerful than almost any full-sized nation of its time. It was queen of the sea and a barrier against the formidable Turks.

This city, Venice, which was like an Italian Athens born after its time, or an Italian Amsterdam born before, had its birth at the time of the invasion of Italy by Attila the Hun in 452. Fleeing Italians hid in the lagoons offshore along the northern Adriatic and about this colony as the nucleus Venice arose.

While the Franks, the Byzantines, the Lombards, and the papacy all struggled for control over Italy, Venice, under skillful leadership, managed to gain for itself a steadily increasing independence and, through trade, a steadily increasing prosperity.

Venetian prosperity and power climbed steeply during the period of the Crusades, since it, along with several other Italian cities, had the ships to carry the Crusaders and their supplies-and charged healthily for it. By 1203 Venice could blackmail a group of Crusaders into attacking the Byzantine Empire first. In 1204 the Crusaders took Constantinople itself and the Byzantine Empire was divided as loot, with a considerable share going to Venice, which thus became a major Mediterranean power.

Venice embarked on a long struggle with Genoa, a port on the other side of the Italian boot, and by 1380 had won completely. The war made her aware of her need for continental territories to assure herself of food supr plies despite the ups and downs of naval warfare. She spread out into nearby Italy and by 1420 northeastern Italy was hers from the Adriatic nearly to Lake Como.

The fifteenth century, however, saw her pass her peak. The Turk captured Constantinople in 1453 and it became less easy to trade with the East The Portuguese explorers circled Africa by 1497 and, as it grew possible to bypass the Mediterranean, the Venetian stranglehold on trade with the East further diminished.

Then, ha the sixteenth century, France, Spain, and the Empire began to use Italy as a battleground and the entire peninsula, including Venice, was reduced to misery.

But even in Shakespeare's time, although Venice was no longer what she had been, she remained a romantic land, with the trappings of empire still about herself-an efficient, stable, and long-established government over wealthy merchants and skillful seamen with territory and bases here and there in the Mediterranean. What's more,

Shakespeare's century saw Venice reach its artistic heights. Titian and Tintoretto were sixteenth-century Venetians, for instance.

Then too, even in decline, Venice remained Europe's shield against the Turks throughout Shakespeare's lifetime and for several decades after his death.

… why I am so sad

The play opens with Antonio on stage. He is the "merchant" of the title and he is in conversation with two friends, Salerio and Solanio. Antonio says:

> In sooth I know not why I am so sad.
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

The sadness is never explicitly explained in the play and it may be accepted as simply setting a mood. Antonio, after all, is to spend much of the play in a position of great danger.

However, it is possible to speculate that there is a more specific cause of sadness, one which Shakespeare does not care to elaborate upon. As will appear soon enough, Antonio has a male friend to whom he is devoted with a self-sacrificial intensity that is almost unbelievable. This friend, we are soon to find out, is about to woo a young lady in the hope of marrying her.

Antonio may very easily be meant by Shakespeare to represent the nobility of homosexual love, something he hints at in several plays (as, for instance, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* see page I-473) without quite daring to be specific about it.

Well then, if Antonio's friend has, in the eagerness of his new plans involving a lady, grown more distant, is not this reason enough for the poor man to be sad-and yet be unable to explain it, without disgrace, to his friends?

… your argosies…

His friends, however, have a more prosaic explanation. Salerio suggests that he is nervous over the state of his business affairs, saying:

> Your mind is tossing on the ocean,

There where your argosies with portly sail-

—Act I, scene i, lines 8-9

The word "argosies" harks back to a city founded on the eastern shore of the Adriatic in the seventh century by refugees, as Venice had similarly been founded two centuries earlier. In this case, the founders were Greeks who were being pushed out of the interior by invading Slavs. The new city was named Ragusium, better known to us in the Italian version of the name, Ragusa.

Ragusa was, for a time, a flourishing trading city, much like Venice itself, or like Genoa and Pisa. Ragusa was particularly known for its large merchant ships, which were called *ragusea.* In English the first two letters were transposed and the word became "argosy."

It is clear from these opening exchanges, then, that Antonio is an extremely wealthy merchant, but one whose business involves extreme risk. Antonio, however, pooh-poohs the chances of these risks coming to pass.

… two-headed Janus

But if Antonio is not worried about business and is merely irrationally sad, then, says Solanio with a touch of impatience, he might just as well be irrationally merry. Solanio says:

… Now by two-headed Janus,
Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time:
Some that will evermore peep through their eyes
And laugh like parrots at a bagpiper,
And other of such vinegar aspect
That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile
Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable.

—Act I, scene i, lines 50-56

In other words, some people are, by simple temperament, happy; others sad.

As for Janus, he is the most familiar of the purely Roman (that is, non-Greek) gods. He was the god of doorways and therefore the god of going in and going out. (The word "janitor" is derived from his name.) It is an easy extension from that to seeing in him the god of

beginnings and endings, of comings and goings (and January, the beginning of the year, is named in his honor.)

In the Roman forum Janus was honored with a temple whose gates were open in time of war and closed in time of peace. Rome's military history was such that for seven centuries they were hardly ever closed.

Though on Roman representations he is shown with two identical faces in opposite directions, it is possible to improve on that. Since he is the god of beginnings and endings, he might be imagined to have one face turned toward the past and the other toward the future.

It could easily be imagined that the past-viewing face was cheerful, since the pains of the past were over, while the forward-viewing face was sad, since there was uncertainty as to what the pains of the future might be-hence the figure of speech in Solanio's statement.

> … let my liver rather heat.. .

Three other friends of Antonio enter: Bassanio, Gratiano, and Lorenzo, while Salerio and Solanio leave.

Gratiano also notes Antonio's sadness and he too advocates merriment for its own sake. He says to Antonio:

> Let me play the fool!
> With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come,
> And let my liver rather heat with wine
> Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.

—Act I, scene i, lines 79-82

The link between liver and wine might seem at first blush to indicate that Shakespeare had a prescient knowledge of the connection physicians would eventually draw between cirrhosis of the liver and alcoholism.

Nothing of the sort. The liver is the largest gland in the body, weighing three or four pounds in man and being correspondingly large in other mammals. It is easy to equate size and importance and to argue that the liver is so large because it has a peculiarly important function and must therefore serve as the seat of life and of the emotions. (The similarity between "liver" and "live" is not accidental.)

Contributing to this also is the fact that ancient priests, looking for prognostications of things to come, would often study the liver of animals sacrificed to the gods. This is natural, since the liver is so

large and varies so in detail from animal to animal that it is particularly easy to study. Yet it is not the ease that can be advanced as a reason, so special importance must be insisted upon instead.

In Belmont …

It is Bassanio with whom Antonio is in love and the strength of the lat-ter's affection is quickly shown. Bassanio has been living beyond his means and is deeply in debt. He has been forced to borrow and says, frankly:

… To you, Antonio,
I owe the most in money and in love,

—Act I, scene i, lines 130-31

But Antonio is willing to continue the support. He says earnestly to Bassanio:

… be assured
My purse, my person, my extremest means
Lie all unlocked to your occasions [needs].

—Act I, scene i, lines 137-39

Surely the attachment on Antonio's side can only be love in its fullest sense. Yet it may be one-sided. Bassanio's affection may be nothing more than friendship, for he seems to have no hesitation in attempting to draw on Antonio's support for a competing love.

Bassanio explains that he may be in a position to repay all he has borrowed if only Antonio will be willing to invest a bit more. He says:

In Belmont is a lady richly left;

—Act I, scene i, line 161

In short, Bassanio knows of a rich heiress and if he can marry her, he can pay off all his debts. All he needs is enough money to appear a respectable suitor; he cannot go as a beggar.

(The beginning of Bassanio's speech makes him sound like a fortune hunter, but the play will amply show that he wants the woman for herself and that the money is secondary. He stresses the money now because he wants to explain that he will be able to pay off his debt to Antonio, and not that he is greedy for wealth for himself.)

As for Belmont, that may well be a fictitious name for the estate left to the heiress. In the Italian tale from which this portion of the plot is derived, the place is Belmonte, and there is a Belmonte in Italy, on the western shore of the Italian toe, a little over five hundred miles south of Venice. Probably there is no connection, and as far as the play is concerned, it doesn't matter where Belmont is, but it is interesting that a Belmonte exists.

> Her name is Portia.. .

Bassanio has seen the lady and knows her to be beautiful and virtuous. He says:

> Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
> To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia;

—Act I, scene i, lines 165-66

Brutus' Portia-that is, his wife-appears as a pattern of Roman virtue in *Julius Caesar* (see page I-281), a play Shakespeare wrote some two years after *The Merchant of Venice.*

> … Calchos' strand

Bassanio goes on in his lyrical praise of Portia to say:

> … her sunny locks
> Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
> Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strond,
> And many Jasons come in quest of her.

—Act I, scene i, lines 169-72

The tale of the Golden Fleece is one of the most famous in Greek mythology. Two children, the son and daughter of a king of Thebes,

had a wicked stepmother. With the help of the gods they were whisked away from Thebes on the back of a winged ram with a golden fleece (see page I-541). The ram flew them to what must have seemed the end of the world to the very early Greeks-the easternmost shore of the Black Sea.

On the way, the girl, Helle, fell off and drowned in one of the narrow waterways between the Aegean and the Black seas, a waterway known as the "Hellespont" in consequence. The boy, however, was carried safely to the kingdom of Colchis (called Colchos in this Shakespearean passage). The King of Colchis, Aeetes, sacrificed the ram and suspended the Golden Fleece from a tree, leaving it under the guard of a never sleeping dragon.

To attain that Golden Fleece and bring it back to Greece was a worthy aim for an adventurer, and Jason, an exiled Thessalian prince, undertook the quest. With a fifty-oared ship, the *Argo,* and a crew of heroes, he penetrated the Black Sea and won the Fleece.

… the County Palatine

When Bassanio is done explaining, Antonio promptly offers to finance the project in a characteristic burst of selflessness. With that done the scene shifts at once to Belmont, where we meet Portia and her companion, Nerissa.

It seems that Portia's father, in dying, has left three caskets behind, one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead. Each suitor must choose one of the caskets, and only he who picks the correct casket, the one with Portia's portrait inside, can marry her. If the suitor loses, he must swear to leave at once and never to reveal which casket he had chosen.

There are many suitors come to take their chances and Portia has an opportunity to display her mocking wit at their expense (and Shakespeare has a chance to air his prejudices).

Nerissa mentions a prince of Naples first and he is dismissed by Portia at once as interested only in horses and horsemanship. Nerissa then says:

Then is there the County Palatine.

—Act I, scene ii, line 44

In the early Middle Ages a "count palatine" was a high official who served in the King's household; that is, in the palace. Eventually,

the title came to be inherited only as a tide and without any special house-holdly duties.

In only one case did the title remain prominent, and that was hi connection with a tract of land along the middle Rhine River whose ruler remained the Count Palatine. The territory was therefore known as the "Palatinate." Its capital was at Heidelberg.

In Shakespeare's time the Palatinate was a center of German Calvinism, a form of religion which was similar to English Puritanism. In 1592, just a few years before *The Merchant of Venice* was written, Frederick IV succeeded to the title. He was a sincere Calvinist (he was called "Frederick the Upright"), which meant he was grave and solemn to a degree.

It was perhaps with that in mind that Shakespeare has Portia say with respect to him:

> He hears merry tales and smiles not;
> I fear he will prove the weeping philosopher
> when he grows old, being so full of unmannerly
> sadness in his youth.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 46-49

There was a "weeping philosopher"; he was Heraclitus of Ephesus, who lived about 500 B.C. and whose gloomy view of life caused him to weep over the follies of mankind. (There was also a "laughing philosopher," Democritus of Abdera, who lived about 400 b.c. and whose cheerful disposition enabled him to laugh over the follies of mankind.)

> … every man in no man.. .

A reference to a French suitor has Portia say:

> Why, he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan's,
> a better bad habit of frowning than the Count Palatine;
> he is every man in no man. If a throstle sing,
> he jails straight a-cap'ring;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 57-60

This is, in part, the old stereotype of the Frenchman-a frivolous person without strong convictions who takes on the coloring of his surroundings. In this case, Shakespeare may even have a specific case in mind.

In 1593, just three years before *The Merchant of Venice* was written, the French Protestant leader Henry of Navarre (pictured so favorably in *Love's Labor's Lost,* see page I-423) accepted Catholicism to establish himself as King Henry IV. To English Protestants this was a perfect case of French lack of principle.

… his behavior everywhere

An English suitor does not escape Portia's sharp tongue either. Concerning him, she says:

> How oddly he is suited [outfitted]!
> 1 think he bought his doublet in Italy,
> his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany,
> and his behavior everywhere.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 72-75

This is the old complaint of the conservative nationalistic Englishman (of whom Shakespeare is so often a spokesman) that the younger generation is mad for foreign novelties and has nothing but contempt for the traditions of their own land. (This view is not confined to England or to the sixteenth century.)

… borrowed a box of the ear…

The mention of a Scotsman brings forth an expression of contempt from Portia, who says:

> … he hath a neighborly charity in him,
> for he borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman
> and swore he would pay him again when he was able.
> I think the Frenchman became his surety.. .

—Act I, scene ii, lines 78-81

Scotland was, like France, one of England's traditional enemies. Since Scotland was much weaker than France it was regularly beaten, so that Shakespeare can indulge in a rather cheap vaunt over an enemy that was often defeated but never accepted defeat.

As a matter of fact, the sixteenth century saw England inflict two disastrous boxes of the ear upon Scotland. In 1513 England defeated Scotland in the Battle of Flodden Field (see page II-746), and then again, in 1542, at the Battle of Solway Moss.

Shakespeare's reference to the Frenchman becoming the Scotsman's surety refers to the traditional friendship between France and Scotland. France was always ready to support Scotland financially in her wars against England, but was never able to support her by direct military force.

Then Nerissa asks about another:

> How like you the young German,
> the Duke of Saxony's nephew?

—Act I, scene ii, lines 83-84

To which Portia replies:

> Very vilely in the morning when he is sober,
> and most vilely in the afternoon when he is drunk.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 85-86

This was no more than a matter of making fun of the proverbial German habit of drunkenness, but Shakespeare hit closer than he knew. The Elector of Saxony (a title unique to Germany, which Shakespeare converts into the more familiar "duke") had, at the time *The Merchant of Venice* was written, a younger brother who was then about twelve years old, and who grew up to be a notorious drunkard.

> … as old as Sibylla. ..

However, none of these suitors will even try the casket test. They are there only to serve as butts for Portia's jokes, and now Nerissa reports they are leaving. Portia is relieved, but she insists she will marry only in accordance with the casket test just the same:

// / live to be as old as Sibylla,
I will die as chaste as Diana unless
I be obtained by the manner of my father's will.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 105-7

Sibylla's age was proverbial (see page I-452) and Shakespeare makes use of that in several plays.

… the Marquis of Montferrat

But now we get down to business. Nerissa asks:

Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time,
a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier, that came hither
in company of the Marquis of Montferrat?

—Act I, scene ii, lines 111-13

The marquisate of Montferrat was an independent state in Shakespeare's time located just north of Genoa. In 1587 Vicenzo I became marquis. His immediate predecessors had been enlightened rulers who had patronized art and literature and were therefore looked upon with great favor by artists and writers. Vicenzo himself helped deliver the great poet Torquato Tasso from the insane asylum to which he had been sent as a result of his paranoid mania.

Nevertheless, Vicenzo was a most extravagant and wasteful ruler, and at the time *The Merchant of Venice* was written, these proclivities of his were quite clear. If Bassanio was his friend and had been forced to keep up with him, no wonder he managed to go through so much of Antonio's fortune.

It was undoubtedly on this earlier visit that Bassanio had seen Portia and discovered her beauty and virtue. She had not been unaffected either, for on the mere mention of him she grows excited. But new suitors are coming and the scene reaches its end.

Three thousand ducats. ..

Back in Venice, there is the problem of financing Bassanio.

Antonio's ready cash is tied up in his merchant vessels, so the young man must borrow the actual money elsewhere. Antonio, however, is willing to act as guarantor of the loan. (Otherwise, Bassanio would lack the credit to borrow anything at all.)

The third scene of the play opens, then, with Bassanio in conversation with a prospective source of money. The man of whom the loan is being requested says musingly (for it is a large sum):

> Three thousand ducats-well.
>
> —Act I, scene iii, line 1

In the Middle Ages there were few regions with a sufficiently reliable supply of silver to issue good coins. Venice was one of the exceptions. Her rich trade brought precious metals to her gates and it paid her to use them in producing good coins of full weight and honest value. The reputation of Venice lay behind the coins and merchants from all over Europe and the Mediterranean lands were anxious to accept those coins-which was to the benefit of Venetian trade.

These coins were put out by the Duchy of Venice, a state which in the Italian language was the "Ducato di Venezia," so that the coins were called *ducati* or, in English, "ducats." Good coins, also called ducats, were put out by the Duchy of Apulia in southern Italy.

In either case, three thousand ducats was a huge sum for the tune. Bassanio was not skimping.

The person to whom Bassanio is talking is not an ordinary Venetian. We can picture him (and he is usually presented on the stage) as a tall man with a beak of a nose, a long black beard, curly sideburns, a skull cap, and a long black coat. He is, in short, a Jew, and his name is Shylock.

Shylock is not a Jewish name; there was never a Jew named Shylock that anyone has heard of; the name is an invention of Shakespeare's which has entered the common language (because of the power of the characterization of the man) to represent any grasping, greedy, hard-hearted creditor. I have heard Jews themselves use the word with exactly this meaning, referring back to Shakespeare's character.

Where did Shakespeare get the name? There is a Hebrew word *shalakh,* which appears twice in the Bible (Leviticus 11:17 and Deuteronomy 14:17). In both places, birds of prey are being listed as unfit articles of diet for Jews. No one knows exactly what bird is meant by *shalakh,* but the usual translation into English gives it as

"cormorant."

The cormorant is a sea bird which eats fish so voraciously that the word has come to mean personified greed and voraciousness. Shakespeare apparently is using a form of the Hebrew word both as name and characterization of the Jewish moneylender.

> … upon the Rialto…

Shylock hesitates. The loan is a large one but Antonio, who is being offered as surety, has a good reputation for honest business dealing and is known to be wealthy enough to cover the sum. And still Shylock hesitates, for Antonio's ventures are thinly spread and he is at the moment in a period of unusual risk. Shylock says of Antonio:

> … he hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies;
> I understand, moreover, upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico,
> a fourth for England-and other ventures he hath, squandered abroad.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 17-21

Of the places listed by Shylock, the least familiar is Tripolis. This word means "three cities" in Greek and any city built up out of the union of three towns is liable to be given that name. As an example there is one in northern Africa, which is better known to us by the Italian version of the name, Tripoli. It is the capital of the modern kingdom of Libya.

There is also a second Tripolis on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, in what is now Lebanon. It is the second largest city of that nation nowadays, and is better known to the west as Tripoli. Its Arabic name is Tarabulus.

Which Tripoli Antonio's argosy was bound for, whether the one on the southern or the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, we have no way of telling.

Shylock heard his news "upon the Rialto," a phrase that needed no explanation for the audience of the play.

In 1590, some seven years before *The Merchant of Venice* was written, the Venetians built a magnificent marble bridge across the Grand Canal, their chief waterway. The Latin *rivus altus* means "deep stream," and a bridge crossing the stream would very likely adopt its name. The Italian version of the phrase is "Rialto."

The Rialto bridge was lined with a row of shops on either side and with a broad footpath between. It became a busy commercial center and Venetian merchants and traders would gather there to exchange news and gossip.

> … your prophet the Nazarite …

Despite his misgivings, Shylock thinks Antonio is good surety for the loan. Bassanio, eager to help Shylock come to a favorable decision, invites him to dinner, and Shylock draws back at once:

> Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation
> which your prophet the Nazarite conjured
> the devil into!

—Act I, scene iii, lines 31-33

So far the exchange between Bassanio and Shylock has indicated nothing of the religious difference; it might have been any two men discussing a business deal. But now, with the mention of eating, comes the first clear stamp of Jewishness upon Shylock. He won't eat pork!

The Jewish abhorrence of pork is based on biblical statutes. The eleventh chapter of the Book of Leviticus states that only those beasts that have a cloven hoof and that chew the cud are ritually clean and may be eaten and sacrificed. As one example of a beast that is not ritually clean, the seventh and eighth verses say: "And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch."

Many other creatures are listed as unclean in the chapter; such as the camel, the hare, the owl, the cormorant, the shellfish, and so on.

It is the pig, though, that stands out. Most of the other creatures forbidden to Jews were not a customary part of the diet of Gentiles either. Pork, on the other hand, was a favored dish of Gentiles, and for Jews to have so extreme an abhorrence of it seemed most peculiar.

It became a hallmark of the difference between Jew and Gentile. When Antiochus IV of the Seleucid Empire tried to eradicate Judaism in the second century b.c., he insisted that Jews eat pork as the best way of indicating they had abandoned their religion (and a number of Jews suffered martyrdom rather than comply). In medieval Europe too the value of a conversion from Judaism was judged by the eagerness with which the erstwhile Jew ate pork.

Shylock, in his comment on pork, does not, however, refer to the Old Testament prohibition. The Elizabethan audience would not have been familiar with that. The dietary laws of the Mosaic Code had, in the Christian view, been superseded through a vision St. Peter had had (as is described in Chapter 10 of the Book of Acts) and the Leviticus chapter was therefore a dead letter.

Instead, Shylock is made to express his disgust by means of a reference to the New Testament. The reference is to a wonder tale concerning Jesus which describes how at one time he evicted many devils from a man possessed and sent them into a herd of swine. The version in Matthew states (8:32) that the devils "went into the herd of swine and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters."

Presumably, Shylock scorns pork as evil-haunted, and feels swine to be a fit habitation for demons and therefore most unfit food for men. And, of course, we might also view the passage as a mocking reference by Shy-lock to the kind of childish and superstitious tales (in his view) that made up the Christian religion.

In actual fact, a Jew of the time would have been careful to avoid mocking at Christianity or to refer sneeringly to "your prophet the Nazarite," out of consideration for his own safety in a hostile world. Shakespeare, however, was intent on constructing a villain, and how better to do so than to have him sneer at what the audience held sacred.

It is also important to remember that neither Shakespeare nor his audience had any firsthand knowledge of how Jews talked or acted anyway. The Jews had been driven out of England by Edward I in 1290, and save for a few special exceptions, they were still absent from the land in Shakespeare's time. They were not allowed to return, in fact, until the time of Oliver Cromwell, forty years after Shakespeare's death.

> … a fawning publican. ..

Now Antonio enters and Shylock views him with instant hate. He says, aside:

> How like a fawning publican he looks.
> I hate him for he is a Christian;

—Act I, scene iii, lines 38-39

The word "publican" occurs on a number of occasions in the New Testament, where it is used for those who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman masters of Judea. A tax collector is never popular and one who collects on behalf of an occupying power is doubly damned. "Publican" was therefore a term of opprobrium among the Jews of Roman times. The word is frequently coupled with "sinners," so that when the Pharisees wished to express their disapproval of Jesus, they pointed out that he ate "with publicans and sinners" (as in Matthew 9:11, for instance).

Certainly Antonio cannot possibly be considered a publican and it is very likely that an actual Jew would not so glibly have used a term that does not occur in the Old Testament. But Shakespeare's audience knew "publican" as a word associated with the only Jews they really knew, those spoken of in the New Testament, and as a word of opprobrium besides.

Thus, the very use of the word, whether sensible or not, indicated Shy-lock's Jewishness, and that is what Shakespeare wanted it to do.

Shylock's next remark about hating Christians further emphasizes his unrelieved villainy to a good Christian audience. They are not likely to reflect that the Jews of Shakespeare's time had little to associate with their Christian neighbors but abuse, blows, and worse and could scarcely be expected to love them for it. (As Israel Zangwill, the English-Jewish writer, is supposed to have said with sardonic bitterness in the last years of the nineteenth century: "The Jews are a frightened people. Nineteen centuries of Christian love have broken down their nerves.")

And yet the Christians were but victims of their training too. Each Christian knew of Jews from the New Testament tales that were repeated in church week in and week out. The Jews had rejected Jesus and demanded the crucifixion. The Jews had opposed and persecuted the apostles. In the time of the Crusades, tales arose that Jews poisoned wells and sacrificed Christian children as part of the celebration of the Passover.

Furthermore, added to all these abstractions, there was in England a contemporary case of an actual Jew of alleged enormous villainy. Queen Elizabeth I had had as her personal physician one Roderigo Lopez. He first accepted the post in 1586.

Lopez was of Portuguese origin, which made him a foreigner, and he had once been a Jew, which made him worse than a foreigner. To be sure, he was converted to Christianity, but born Christians generally suspected the sincerity of a Jew's conversion.

In 1594 Lopez came under suspicion of trying to poison the Queen in return for Spanish bribes. It is the modern opinion that he was innocent, and certainly Queen Elizabeth seemed to believe he was

innocent. The Earl of Essex (of whom Shakespeare was a devoted follower) held a strong belief in Lopez' guilt and forced a trial. A Portuguese ex-Jew could scarcely expect a very objective or fair trial, and Lopez was convicted and then executed before a huge crowd under conditions of utmost brutality.

The execution made the whole question of Jewish villainy very topical, and a play entitled *The Jew of Malta* was promptly revived. This play, first produced in 1589, had been written by Christopher Marlowe (who had died in 1593) and dealt with the flamboyant and monstrous villainy of a Jew. The revival was enormously successful.

Shakespeare, who always had his finger on the popular pulse, and who was nothing if not a "commercial" writer, at once realized the value of writing a play of his own about a villainous Jew, and *The Merchant of Venice* was the result.

> The rate of usance …

But Shakespeare is Shakespeare; he cannot make his Jew a simple straw man of unreasoning villainy. Shylock must have rational motives, and he says, in further explanation of his hatred of Antonio:

> He lends out money gratis, and brings down
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 41-42

"Usance" represents the "use" of money, and closely allied to it is the word "usury." In early times money was usually lent as a gesture of friendship or charity, to relieve distress; and it would seem a most ignoble act to take back more than was lent. To charge "usance" (or "interest") was strongly condemned by the ethical teachings of Judaism. In Exodus 22:25 God is described as saying: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury."

In a more complicated society, however, money is lent not necessarily to friends, but to strangers; and not to those who are in personal need, but to those who need ready money to begin a course of action that will eventually (it is hoped) lead to profit The money is hired for business purposes and the hire should be paid for. Naturally the rate of payment should be greater if the risk of loss is greater.

The medieval church did not distinguish between lending out of charity and lending out of business need, and interest on both were

alike forbidden.

The Jews, however, might interpret the Exodus verse as applying to "my people" (i.e., Jews) only. Lending at interest to non-Jews would therefore be permissible. Furthermore, Jews in Christian countries found themselves locked out of one type of employment after another, until very little was left them but the profession of moneylending, which was (in theory) forbidden to Christians.

Thus was set up the sort of vicious cycle that is constantly used to plague minorities of any land. Jews were forced into becoming usurers and then the fact that they were usurers was used to prove how villainous and hateful they were.

To make matters still more ironical, Christians were by no means as virtuous in the matter as theory had it. The church's strictures could not stand up against economic needs. Christian usurers arose in northern Italy to the point where the term "Lombard" (see page I-447) became synonymous in England with "pawnbroker" or "moneylender." In fact, it was because Italian moneylenders came to England in the thirteenth century that Edward I was able to do without Jews and could expel them from the nation.

… once upon the hip

Shylock broods on the wrongs he and his have suffered, and he mutters:

> If I can catch him once upon the hip [at a disadvantage], /
> will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
> He hates our sacred nation.. .

—Act I, scene iii, lines 43-45

The hatred is thus mutual (and in a passage shortly to come Antonio makes it clear that it is). The villainy is not, however. To the Christian audience, Shylock's hatred of Christians is a mark of dark and malignant villainy, but Antonio's hatred of Jews is very natural and even praiseworthy. Undoubtedly, if the audience consisted entirely of Jews, the view would be precisely reversed-and no more rational.

This double standard in viewing the ethical behavior of oneself and one's enemy is common to almost all men and is the despair of the few.

The skillful shepherd …

Antonio and Bassanio are anxious for a definite reply from Shylock, but Shylock delays as he considers how best he might turn Antonio's need to his advantage.

Shylock is stung, too, by Antonio's scornful hint that ordinarily he does not lend or borrow at interest. Shylock feels it necessary to prove that shrewd bargaining is not sinful.

He turns to the Old Testament and cites the case of Jacob, who agreed with his uncle, Laban, to herd his sheep and goats and take for his own pay only those lambs and kids who were born streaked, spotted, or otherwise not of solid color.

Ordinarily these would have made up a tiny minority of the young (which was why Laban agreed to the bargain), but Jacob peeled wands in such a way as to give them a striped appearance and placed them where the ewes would see them during the act of mating. Shylock says:

> The skillful shepherd pilled me certain wands,
> And in the doing of the deed of kind [mating]
> He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,
> Who then conceiving, did in eaning [lambing] time
> Fall parti-colored lambs, and those were Jacob's.
> This was a way to thrive, and he was blest;
> And thrift is blessing if men steal it not.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 81-87

The story is a reasonably accurate rendition of the second half of the thirtieth chapter of Genesis. The belief that the characteristics of the young can be influenced by the nature of the environment during conception and pregnancy is part of the folklore of the ages, but it lacks any real foundation. No reputable biologist accepts this view, nor can real evidence be cited for it, and even the authority of the Bible is insufficient to put it across.

If the biblical tale were true and if the young animals were born as described, it would have had to be the result of a miracle and not of any natural event brought about by Jacob.

… cite Scripture…

The case of Jacob is a poor one to support usury (something Antonio quickly poults out), and a real Jew could easily have found better arguments. However, the use of the Jacob tale is to condemn Shylock to the andience rather than to support him. Since he is made to quote, with approval, a shady act of business on the part of Jacob, the audience can nod to each other and say "Jews were always like that from the very beginning."

But to avoid some of the blame appearing to stick to the Bible rather than to Shylock (for Shakespeare never knowingly sought trouble with the authorities) Antonio is made to remark in an aside to Bassanio:

> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.

—Act I, scene iii, line 95

This is not merely a metaphorical reference to Shylock, but is a direct derivation from a biblical tale. Matthew tells of Jesus being tested in the desert by the devil, who tries to persuade Jesus to display miraculous powers for prideful self-aggrandizement.

Thus, the devil takes Jesus to the top of the Temple in Jerusalem and urges him to jump off in order that he might display the protection that angels would afford him. The devil accompanies his urging with a quotation from the Old Testament, saying: "… for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." (This is from Matthew 4:6 and the quotation is from Psalms 91:11-12.)

> … my Jewish gaberdine

As Shylock continues to be pressed, his politeness suddenly snaps and his hatred peeps forth. Bitterly, he begins:

> Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
> In the Rialto you have rated [reviled] me
> About my moneys and my usances.
> Still [Always] have I borne it with a patient shrug.
> For suffranee [patience] is the badge of all our tribe.
> You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,
> And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 103-9

The Jewish gaberdine was a long, coarse cloak of the kind pilgrims wore in humility, to show that they were approaching some shrine as sinners hoping to be forgiven. In many places, Jews were forced to wear some distinctive garb of humiliating nature that had the double duty of indicating to the world what sinners they were and at the same time warning Christians from afar, so that they need not be sullied by showing Jews any kindness or courtesy.

Indeed, in the very city of Venice in which this play is laid, and in 1516, some eighty years before the play was written, the authorities went further. It was decided to herd the Jews into a special quarter which could be efficiently isolated. In part, this was a further development of the idea that Jews should not pollute Christians with their presence; and in part there was a kind of humanity behind it, since the Jews were safer in their own section and could be more easily protected by the authorities against looting and lynching. (They could also be more easily massacred en masse if the authorities chose to look the other way.)

For the purpose, the Venetians chose an island on which an iron foundry *(gheto* in Italian) must once have stood, for that was the name of the island. It was established as the Jewish quarter and "ghetto," with an additional "t," has gone ringing down history ever since as the name for any Jewish quarter anywhere and, in very recent times, for any city area occupied largely by any minority group.

Again, a vicious cycle was established. The Jews were forced to dress differently and live separately and were then hated for being different and exclusive.

… an equal pound of your fair flesh.. .

Shylock's point is that he can scarcely be expected to lend money to someone who has treated him with such scorn and hatred. If Antonio had, at this point, been diplomatic, the loan might have been made in ordinary fashion and that would have been that. Instead, however, Antonio answers cruelly:

I am as like to call thee so [dog] again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 127-28

This is utterly out of character for Antonio, who throughout the play is shown to be the soul of courtesy, gentleness, and love, and in the end has mercy even on Shylock. But Shakespeare needs a motive for Shylock's behavior in this play, and Antonio's harshness now, when Shylock all but begs for some sort of Christian remorse for the cruelty shown him, turns his persecuted heart to stone.

He agrees to make the loan but only on a queer condition, saying:

> If you repay me not on such a day,
> In such a place, such sum or sums as are
> Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 142-48

On the surface, there is some generosity being shown here. Shylock is lending money *without interest.* If he is repaid on time, he will take only the three thousand ducats he is lending, no more. And if the money is not repaid, there is a forfeit of a pound of flesh, no money at all.

Shylock suggests this as a kind of merry jest, but it is clear that he is playing a long shot. He has already expressed his doubts of the safety of Antonio's manifold sea ventures, and if something should happen to them, by means of the forfeit he can kill Antonio. If the ships come home safe, he loses interest, of course, but after Antonio's remarks, the loss of interest is worth the slender chance of killing him legally.

Bassanio and Antonio both realize this, and Bassanio, in horror, refuses the deal. Antonio, however, convinced that his ships will return, insists on agreeing to the terms.

It is from this passage and from those following in the play that the phrase "pound of flesh" has entered the language as meaning the wringing out of the last bit of a bargain, however harsh and brutal the consequences.

> … my complexion

The Shylock and Portia scenes now alternate. Back in Belmont, a new suitor arrives, the Prince of Morocco, who begins:

Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
To whom I am a neighbor and near bred.

—Act II, scene i, lines 1-3

There is nothing here to indicate that the Prince of Morocco is anything more than a Moor, that is, a swarthy member of the "white race." However, Shakespeare's emphasis on his complexion induces us to think that he was imagined as a black, for Shakespeare confused Moors and blacks, as in *Titus Andronicus* (see page I-402).

… Sultan Solyman

As Morocco prepares to take the test of the casket, he can't resist boasting a little. He swears he would dare anything to win Portia:

By this scimitar
That slew the Sophy, and a Persian prince
That won three fields of Sultan Solyman,

—Act II, scene i, lines 24-26

"Sultan Solyman" is Suleiman I the Magnificent, under whom the empire of the Ottoman Turks reached the peak of its glory. He reigned from 1520 to 1566 and during that reign he was the strongest ruler in Europe, far greater in war and peace than the contemporary Christian monarchs: Henry VIII, Charles V, and Francis I (see page II-747), whose names make so much greater noise in the West-oriented chronicles of our historians.

During the early part of his reign Suleiman led the Ottoman armies deep into Europe. In 1526 he destroyed the Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohacs and absorbed most of Hungary into his realm. In 1529 he reached the peak of his fortunes when he actually laid siege to Vienna (which, however, he did not succeed in taking).

Suleiman might have done even better against Europe, had he not also had to face eastward and battle the Persians, who, although Moslems, were of a different sect. Between 1548 and 1555 there was strenuous war between Suleiman and the Persians; a war which was won by Suleiman, but not by a very great margin. There were further

wars between the Ottoman Empire and the Persians after Suleiman's death. Indeed, one was in progress at the time *The Merchant of Venice* was being written, so that Morocco's reference was topical.

From Morocco's words we might suppose he fought as an Ottoman ally, for it was Persians he claims to have beaten. When Morocco says he "slew the Sophy," he is referring to the Shah of Persia.

In the sixteenth century Persia was undergoing one of its periods of greatness under the rule of a family descended from one San-al-Din, who had lived in the thirteenth century. The family was called the Safavids, and this became "Sophy" in English.

The first ruler of the Safavid line was Ismail I, who came to the throne in 1501. In 1587 Abbas I became shah. He was the greatest of the line and is sometimes called Abbas the Great. He labored to reform and revitalize the Persian army and make it more fit to defend the land against the Ottoman Turks. In this he had some help, for in 1598 an English mission arrived in Persia to negotiate a treaty against the common Turkish enemy.

Thus, at the tune that *The Merchant of Venice* was written, references to Persia and the Sophy were easily understood.

Nevertheless, Morocco, despite his vauntings, realizes that the casket choice means that luck, not valor, will give the victory. He says:

> // Hercules and Lichas play at dice
> Which is the better man, the greater throw
> May turn by fortune from the weaker hand.
> So is Alcides beaten by his page.

—Act II, scene i, lines 32-35

Lichas is the attendant of Hercules (or Alcides, see page I-70), and, as it happens, he comes to a bad end (see page I-380).

> … thou a merry devil

Before we come to Morocco's casket choice, however, it is back to Venice and a distant glimpse of Shylock's home life. Onto the stage comes Launcelot Gobbo, Shylock's Christian house servant. Launcelot is considering leaving Shylock, for as a good Christian, he has qualms about serving a Jew.

Eventually, after an encounter with his blind father, Launcelot

enters the service of Bassanio. He announces this change of service to Shylock's daughter (who makes her first appearance). She says:

> I am sorry thou wilt leave my father so;
> Our house is hell, and thou a merry devil
> Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 1-3

There is, of course, nothing to indicate that Shylock is cruel to his daughter or anything but a good family man (although he is later shown to be puritanical and intent on keeping his daughter from participating in foolish merrymaking). Nevertheless, the audience would readily assume that a Jew's home would be bound to be hellish.

Jessica is beautiful and lacks all the stigmata associated by Elizabethan audiences with Jews. Thus, Launcelot weeps at leaving her, even though she is as Jewish as Shylock.

This is, of course, an old convention. The villainous Jew (or Moslem, or Indian chief, or Chinese mandarin) very frequently has a beautiful daughter who falls in love with the handsome Christian and betrays her people for his sake to the cheers of the audience. In modern action tales, the beautiful Russian girl can hardly wait to fall in love with the handsome American spy and switch sides. (The audience would consider it unspeakably horrible if the situation were reversed, however.)

The name "Jessica" by the way, is not likely to strike modern readers as particularly Jewish, yet is much more so than "Shylock." Toward the end of the eleventh chapter of Genesis, the sister of the wife of Abraham's brother, Nahor, is given as Iscah. It is of this name that Jessica is a form.

> Become a Christian…

That Jessica is in love with a Christian appears at once, for she loves Lorenzo, who has already appeared as a friend of Antonio's. Jessica says in a soliloquy after bidding Launcelot goodbye:

> Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
> To be ashamed to be my father's child!
> But though I am a daughter to his blood,
> I am not to his manners.
> O Lorenzo, If thou keep promise,

I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife!

—Act II, scene iii, lines 16-21

This demonstrates that medieval prejudice against the Jew was, in theory at least, religious rather than racial. If the Jew were to consent to become a Christian he would then be accepted into the Christian community on an equal basis.

Actually, this was by no means always so. In Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century, extreme pressures forced the conversion of many Jews, who were then nevertheless discriminated against by those who took to calling themselves "Old Christians." The converts were called "marranos" ("swine"), and no matter how they attempted to be Christian they were forever suspected of being secretly Jewish.

… Black Monday …

The opportunity for Jessica to run off with Lorenzo soon appears. Shy-lock has been invited to dinner with Bassanio, and he is going despite the fact that he will "smell pork." This means Jessica will be left alone.

Launcelot Gobbo, who has carried the invitation from his new master to his old, promises there will be entertainment (to Shylock's further discomfort, for he is puritanical in his outlook-another proof of villainy to a theatergoing audience). Launcelot says:

I will not say you shall see a masque, but if you do,
it was not for nothing that my nose fell a-bleeding
on Black Monday last at six o'clock i' th' morning,

—Act II, scene v, lines 22-25

This is a satire against the habit of finding a premonition in everything. After all, what can a nosebleed "on Black Monday last" have to do with a masque tonight?

The adjective "black" is sometimes used to commemorate some particularly disastrous occurrence. This particular case dates back to 1360, some two and a quarter centuries before *The Merchant of Venice* was written. At that tune Edward III, who had won two great victories

in France (see page II-257), settled down in March to lay siege to Paris itself.

The army was reduced in numbers as the result of the previous winter's campaigning and was in want of provisions besides. It was not equipped to withstand a really bad siege of weather, but it was hoped that with spring well under way and the French badly demoralized the siege would not last long.

How wrong they were! On Monday, April 14, 1360, the day after Easter Sunday, a tremendous hailstorm struck the English camp. The fierce wind and unseasonable cold, the hail and the darkness all combined to strike a superstitious fear into the hearts of those who survived the horrible day.

The siege was lifted and Edward himself was sufficiently disheartened to decide on peace. This was signed on May 8 and the rest of Edward's long reign was an inglorious anticlimax. England was not to regain the upper hand in France until the reign of Henry V and the Battle of Agincourt (see page II-498) a half century later.

This Black Monday of 1360 left enough impression on English minds to give the name to Easter Monday ever after.

… Hagar's offspring …

But Launcelot is doing more than bringing Bassanio's invitation to Shy-lock. He is also bringing a secret message from Lorenzo to Jessica, arranging for the elopement, and he cannot resist hinting to her of this in phrases that Shylock imperfectly overhears. Shylock says sharply to Jessica:

What says that fool of Hagar's offspring, ha?

—Act II, scene vi, line 43

Sarah, the wife of Abraham and the ancestress of the Jews, had a handmaiden named Hagar. Since Sarah herself was barren, she gave the handmaiden to Abraham in order that he might have a son by her. This, indeed, came to pass and Hagar's son was named Ishmael.

When, years later, Sarah herself bore Abraham a son, Isaac, it was this younger son who was designated as Abraham's heir. Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, were evicted from the family and sent away in order that there be no dispute over the inheritance.

Thus, one might metaphorically speak of Hagar's offspring, Ishmael, as representing those who did not really inherit the covenant

God made with Abraham and over whom the mantle of the true religion did not fall. Shylock would use such a term as a contemptuous designation for any Christian.

Jessica quiets her father's suspicions and, as soon as he is gone, she disguises herself as a boy and joins Lorenzo, taking with her a good supply of her father's money.

That she should escape from her father and elope with a lover, anyone would be ready to excuse since we are all sympathetic with the drives of love. That she should also steal from her father is a less sympathetic action in modern eyes. However, to Elizabethan audiences, stealing from a Jew was not really stealing.

The Hyrcanian deserts. ..

Meanwhile the Prince of Morocco, back in Belmont, must choose among the three caskets. The gold casket bears a legend that says:

"Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire."

-Act II, scene vii, line 37

Morocco does not hesitate. Surely this can only refer to Portia, for as he says:

The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds
Of wide Arabia are as throughfares now
For princes to come view fair Portia.

—Act II, scene vii, lines 41-43

Regions are named which are as distant and unattainable as can be imagined. Arabia is an utterly unknown desert to Christians of Shakespeare's time, and the original home of the feared Moslems.

As for Hyrcania, that was the name of the region south of the Caspian Sea (which was therefore called the Hyrcanian Sea in Roman times). Hyrcania reached its period of greatest prominence in the time of the Parthian Empire during the first and second centuries. Parthia was then the great enemy of Rome and its Hyrcanian heartland was never reached by Roman armies.

So Morocco chooses the golden casket and finds a skull inside. Apparently many men desire gold and, in searching out their heart's

desire, find death instead. He loses and must leave forthwith.

… he shall pay for this

In Venice, Jessica's elopement has been carried through. Shylock has discovered the loss of his daughter, together with the money and jewels she has stolen, and is distracted.

He suspects Lorenzo and is sure that he is escaping by way of the ship that is taking Bassanio (along with his friend, Gratiano) to Belmont. A search of the ship reveals nothing, but Shylock is nevertheless convinced that Antonio, the friend of Lorenzo, is at the bottom of it.

Solanio tells the tale, mimicking the distracted Shylock, who has gone raging through Venice crying for justice against those who stole his daughter and his ducats. The boys of Venice run after him, mocking, and Solanio himself thinks it is all terribly funny, and so, no doubt, did the Elizabethan audience.

The modern audience, if Shylock is played properly as the tragic character he is, is very likely to find it not funny at all, and to find themselves sympathizing with Shylock Instead.

Solanio does say one thing rather uneasily:

Let good Antonio look he keep his day,
Or he shall pay for this.

—Act II, scene viii, lines 25-26

The forfeit of the pound of flesh had been set in a moment of extreme irritation on Shylock's part. If it had come to the touch it is conceivable that Shylock might have relented. But now, maddened by the conspiracy to rob him of possessions and daughter by the very men (as he was convinced) to whom he had supplied necessary money, he could scarcely be expected to want anything but revenge-revenge to the uttermost. And while the thought of the kind of revenge he anticipates is not something we can sympathize with, it is something we can understand if we can bring ourselves to occupy his shoes for a moment in imagination.

The Prince of Aragon …

And in Belmont there comes another suitor. Nerissa announces

him to Portia:

> The Prince of Aragon hath ta'en his oath,
> And comes to his elections presently.

—Act II, scene ix, lines 2-3

Aragon was the name of a region on the Spanish side of the central Pyrenees to begin with. It was ruled by the kings of Navarre (see page I-422), but in 1035 Sancho III of Navarre left Aragon to his third son, separating it from his kingdom. Independent Aragon then expanded southward at the expense of the Moors, who at that time controlled much of Spain.

By the middle of the fifteenth century Aragon occupied the easternmost fourth of what is now Spain. Most of the rest was occupied by the kingdom of Castile. In 1469 the heir of Castile was an eighteen-year-old girl named Isabella, while the heir of Aragon was a seventeen-year-old boy named Ferdinand. It seemed natural to arrange a marriage. In 1474 the girl became Isabella I, Queen of Castile, while her husband ruled jointly with her as Ferdinand V, King of Castile. In 1479 the old King of Aragon died and Isabella's husband also became Ferdinand II of Aragon.

The two lands were united to form modern Spain and were never separated again. The union was followed by the final defeat of the southern remnant of the Moors in 1492. In that same year Christopher Columbus' first voyage laid the foundation for Spain's vast overseas empire and made her the first true world power.

Although Aragon thus vanished from the map as an independent power a century before *The Merchant of Venice* was written, its name remained green in the minds of Englishmen. Ferdinand and Isabella had a daughter who became a famous and, in her time, popular queen of England-Catherine (or Katherine) of Aragon (see page II-754).

The Prince of Aragon is displayed as a far less attractive character than Morocco. For one thing, he is proud, but then this was taken as a national characteristic of the Spanish stereotype. And, no doubt, the happy accident that Aragon resembles "arrogant" helped Shakespeare choose the title.

The Prince of Aragon dismisses the leaden casket at once since lead is beneath his dignity. The golden casket offers him what many men desire and that is not for him either, since he is not satisfied with what "many" men desire. He is special. The silver casket has a legend, reading:

"Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves."

—Act II, scene ix, line 35

Aragon recognizes no limits to his own deserts and chooses it. He finds it contains the caricature of a fool's head. Only a fool, in other words, places too high a value on his own deserving, and Aragon loses too.

… the Goodwins.. .

But now things suddenly turn black for Antonio. Even when Solanio had been mocking Shylock's grief-stricken outcries two scenes earlier, his friend Salerio had spoken of rumors concerning lost merchant vessels. Now the news is more specific and more damaging. Salerio reports to Solanio the news that

> … Antonio hath a ship of rich lading
> wracked on the narrow seas-the Goodwins
> I think they call the place-a very
> dangerous flat, and fatal…

—Act III, scene i, lines 2-5

The "narrow seas" is the English Channel, or perhaps the Strait of Dover (only two dozen miles wide) in particular. It would seem to us that a Venetian would be more likely to refer to the strait between Italy and Sicily or Spain and Africa as the "narrow seas," but to the English audience of the play, the phrase would have only one meaning.

The "Goodwins" are the Goodwin Sands, seven miles east of the southeastern tip of England. These are a ten-mile-long stretch of treacherous shoals, where the sands are actually partly exposed at low tide.

… I am a Jew. ..

Shylock enters, sorrow-laden and bitter. The two Venetians jeer at him, but when they ask about news concerning Antonio, it is clear

that matters are worse and worse. Shylock is now grimly intent on his bargain and he echoes Solanio's earlier remark when he says of Antonio:

> Let him look to his bond.
> He was wont to call me usurer. Let him look to his bond.

—Act III, scene i, lines 44-45

When Salerio, rather shaken out of his mockery, asks what use Shylock will find in a piece of human flesh, Shylock bursts out into a moving defense of himself and his fellows. It would almost seem that Shakespeare, driven by the force of his own genius and the necessity of creating a well-rounded character at all costs, gives Shylock-all against the playwright's own will, one might think-a tragic dignity and puts words in his mouth that the mocking Venetians can find no words to answer.

What does he want with the pound of flesh? Shylock grinds out:

> To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else,
> it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me,
> and hind'red me half a mil lion,
> laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains,
> scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,
> cooled my friends, heated mine
> enemies-and what's his reason?
> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?
> Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses,
> af fections, passions?-
> fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons,
> subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means,
> warmed and cooled by the same winter and sum mer as a Christian is?
> If you prick us, do we not bleed?
> If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
> If you poison us, do we not die?
> And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?
> If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.
> If a Jew wrong a Christian,
> what is his [the Christian's theoretical] humility?
> Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew,
> what should his sufferance [patience] be by Christian example?

Why re venge! The villainy you teach me
I will execute, and it shall go hard but
I will better the instruction.

—Act HI, scene i, lines 50-69

Remember this is a Jew's defense as placed in his mouth by someone not friendly to Jews. It is not, therefore, the most effective defense a Jew can make. Even so, the points are clear. Shylock does not claim to be better than a Christian. He merely claims to be no worse, and even in the context of the play, that gives him a great deal of room. Everyone in the play humiliates and torments him without conscience or remorse and nowhere and at no time do they consider it wrong. Even the saintly Antonio sees no wrong here.

Shylock, at least, recognizes villainy when he sees it. He admits his own plan to be villainous. His defense is that it has been taught him by Christians. In recognizing the villainy, he rises, in a way, an ethical notch above his tormenters.

How now, Tubal. ..

Solanio and Salerio leave the stage with another sneer, but with no attempt at a real answer. Another Jew enters. Shylock greets him at once with feverish anxiety:

How now, Tubal! What news from Genoa?
Hast thou found my daughter?

—Act III, scene i, lines 75-76

Tubal is no more a personal Jewish name than Shylock is. The name is to be found in the listing of nations in the tenth chapter of Genesis, where in the second verse it is written, "The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras." These are taken to be the names of tribes and regions rather than of true individuals.

The one place where Tubal occurs in a context familiar to the casual biblical reader is in Genesis 4:22, which reads, "And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron."

According to biblical legend, then, Tubal-cain was the first

metallurgist. But even here the name means "smith of Tubal," a region in eastern Asia Minor (one suspects from Assyrian records) famous for its metal production.

Tubal has brought no definite news of Jessica's whereabouts, but has evidence that she gave one of Shylock's jeweled rings to a sailor in exchange for a monkey. Shylock groans in agony and says:

> Thou tortures! me, Tubal. It was my turquoise;
> 1 had it of Leah when I was a bachelor.
> I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

—Act III, scene i, lines 113-16

Shylock's frustrated outcry is undoubtedly designed to get a laugh, and the Elizabethan audience undoubtedly obliged. For us, however, this is surely a remarkably touching moment. Could Shylock, this monster of evil, so love his dead wife and honor her memory? Could there be a spark of love in his harsh heart? Was he a human being?

And what of Jessica, with whom the audience is expected to be completely in sympathy? The ring was her mother's. Was she so completely dead to family affection as to part with it for so trivial and unworthy an exchange? What might this tell us of the effect of conversion from Judaism to Christianity-and does anyone in the audience think of that?

And at the very tune Shylock's heart is ground by the loss of his wife's ring, he hears that Antonio is losing everything through a succession of shipwrecks. More than ever now, he must have his pound of flesh of the man who has abused him so much and who (he surely believes) has arranged the elopement of his wicked daughter.

… a swanlike end

Meanwhile Bassanio and Gratiano have arrived in Belmont. Portia is desperately in love with Bassanio and does not want him to choose, fearing he will guess wrong and be forced to leave. He, however, wants to choose, for he cannot bear the suspense. He advances to the test and Portia, in agony, says:

> Let music sound while he doth make his choice;
> Then if he lose he makes a swanlike end,

—Act III, scene ii, lines 43-44

From classical times it was believed that swans sang before they died. Apparently it seemed natural to suppose that a bird so dignified, graceful, and austerely beautiful ought to be admirable in everything. So many birds were remarkable for the sweetness of their song that if the beautiful swan was mute, surely it could only be because it was saving something supremely wonderful for some divine climax. When better could this climax come than at its death?

This was prettified by legend makers. The swan was felt to be sacred to Apollo and to be filled with his spirit of song at the approach of death, glorying in translation, perhaps, to a better world.

This symbolism of a glorious afterlife, which many of the ancients longed for and which became part of Christian dogma, must have kept the legend going despite the fact that no one ever heard a swan sing at any time. "Swan song" is still used for the last work of a creative artist of any sort.

… young Alcides…

Portia feels Bassanio is going to fight the demon of chance for her hand and compares him to

… young Alcides, when he did redeem
The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
To the sea monster.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 53-57

The reference is to the rescue of Hesione (see page I-403).

Hard food for Midas. ..

Portia has self-righteously declared she cannot give Bassanio any hints, but the music she orders played contains hints just the same. The song urges him to judge not by his eyes alone.

Bassanio gets the point and at once begins to ruminate on the way in which objects that are fair without may be worth nothing within. Apostrophizing the golden casket, he says:

… Therefore then, thou gaudy gold,
Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee;

—Act III, scene ii, lines 101-2

In Greek legend Midas was a king of Phrygia-a land in western Asia Minor that existed prior to 700 b.c. and was then destroyed by nomadic invaders from the east. It did have kings named Mita, which could easily become Midas in Greek.

Phrygia, which gathered its wealth from over a large territory and concentrated it in the royal palace, must have seemed powerful and rich to the tiny city-states of Greece, who were in those days sunk in a Dark Age. Naturally, the wealth of King Midas became legendary.

The story that arose was that Midas had come across the drunken Sile-nus, a favorite of the wine god, Dionysus. Midas treated Silenus well and in return Dionysus offered him anything he might wish. Greedily, Midas asked that anything he touched be turned to gold. This worked well for a while, until he tried to eat. His food turned to gold as he touched it and Midas realized that the "golden touch" meant starvation. He had to beg Dionysus to relieve him of the dangerous gift.

This legend has always been popular among those who, lacking wealth, find in it the consolation of knowing that "money isn't everything," and Bassanio, in scorning gold, gives it the most unfavorable allusion he can think of. It was merely "hard food for Midas."

In speed to Padua.. .

Bassanio chooses the leaden casket as the one least subject to dissimulation without, and, of course, it contains Portia's portrait The two may now marry and are in transports of delight Portia gives Bassanio a ring which he must never part with and the young man swears he will surrender it only with his life. Gratiano chimes in to say he has fallen in love with, and will now marry, Portia's lady in waiting, Nerissa. She gives Gratiano a ring, also.

At the height of their happiness, Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salerio arrive from Venice with the news that Antonio, beggared by the wreckage of his fleets, was unable to meet his debt to Shylock, who is now demanding his pound of flesh.

Portia hastens to send Bassanio back to Venice, placing her entire fortune at his disposal so that he might buy of! Shylock. For herself, she has additional plans. She gives a message to a servant, saying:

Take this same letter,
And use thou all th'endeavor of a man In speed to Padua.
See thou render this Into my cousin's hands, Doctor Bellario;

—Act III, scene iv, lines 47-50

Portia's cousin Bellario is apparently a professor of law at the University of Padua (see page I-447), and her plan involves him and, as she quickly explains to Nerissa, their masquerading as men. (This is a favorite device in the romances of the period. Shakespeare has already used it in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* see page I-469, and in this play, Jessica has already made use of the masquerade. Thus, all three female characters in *The Merchant of Venice* appear, at one time or another, in the costume of a man.)

… the sins of the father…

With Portia and Nerissa gone, Lorenzo and Jessica are in charge at Belmont, and with them, of course, is Launcelot Gobbo, who affects to be unimpressed by Jessica's conversion. He refers to an Old Testament text to make his point when he says:

… look you the sins of the father
are to be laid upon the children.

—Act III, scene v, lines 1-2

This is taken from the Ten Commandments themselves. As part of the second commandment, God is quoted as saying: "… I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Exodus 21:5).

This is actually a rather primitive view, which is altered in the course of the Old Testament itself. The prophet Ezekiel, writing in the time of the Babylonian Exile, quotes God as saying: "Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous

shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:19-20).

Nevertheless, the harsher and more primitive verses of the Old Testament seem always the better known to Christians (perhaps for the greater contrast they make with the New).

> … Charybdis your mother. ..

Of course, Launcelot admits, it may be that Jessica's mother was unfaithful and that Jessica is not truly the daughter of Shylock. Jessica points out that then her mother's sin of infidelity would be visited upon herself and Launcelot agrees and says:

> Thus when I shun Scylla your father,
> I fall into Charybdis your mother.
> Well, you are gone both ways.

—Act III, scene v, lines 15-17

Scylla and Charybdis were a pair of deadly dangers which in Homer's *Odyssey* are described as being on either side of a narrow strait. The strait in question is generally accepted as being the Strait of Messina between Italy and Sicily-which is two and a half miles wide at its narrowest

Scylla is described as a monster on the Italian side of the strait. It has twelve legs and six heads. Each head is on a long neck and is armed with a triple row of teeth. (It is almost impossible to resist the temptation that this is the distorted description of a large octopus with its sucker-studded tentacles.) The heads bark like so many puppies and during the confused yelping, the necks dart forth, with each head snatching at a sailor on any ship that passes beneath.

Charybdis was the personification of a whirlpool on the Sicilian side of the strait, which three times a day sucked down the waters and then threw them up again.

Odysseus had to pass the strait twice. First, with a full ship, he chanced Scylla and lost six men. The next time, alone on a raft, he passed across Charybdis, seizing a branch overhead when the raft was sucked down and waiting for its return before proceeding.

To be "between Scylla and Charybdis" is the classical way of saying "between the devil and the deep sea." The statement "avoiding Scylla, he fell into Charybdis" was used by the Roman poet Horace, whom Launcelot is here paraphrasing.

… saved by my husband. ..

Jessica, however, counters all Launcelot's misgivings with a reference to the New Testament, saying:

/ shall be saved by my husband.
He hath made me a Christian.

—Act III, scene v, lines 18-19

St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians says "… the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean…" (1 Corinthians 7:14).

All this may be mere persiflage, but one is at least entitled to wonder if the cautious Shakespeare is trying to save himself trouble. Anticipating the reactions of those displeased at making a heroine of a Jew's daughter, he places their arguments in the mouth of the clown and answers them.

… hope for mercy.. .

In Venice, Antonio must stand trial. All of Venice, from the Duke himself on downward, are on Antonio's side; all plead with Shylock not to insist on the forfeit. Shylock does insist, however. What's more, he will not accept money in place of the pound of flesh. He wants his revenge, not money.

The Duke says:

How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?

—Act IV, scene i, line 88

Here is another New Testament reference, for it is an echo of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Shylock does not bother to defend himself directly; nor does he hypocritically pretend to be merciful. Instead, he faces down the angry crowd of Christians in the courtroom with a neat poniarding of

their hypocrisy. Scornfully, he says:

> You have among you many a purchased slave,
> Which like your asses and your dogs and mules
> You use in abject and in slavish parts,
> Because you bought them.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 90-93

Shylock has bought human flesh as the Venetians have and has done it at three thousand ducats a pound, a far greater price than any Venetian paid for his. If Shylock is expected to give up what he has bought, why are not the Venetians expected to give up their purchases? (The argument is not foolproof. Shylock is being offered a huge sum to give up his pound; and his purchase means death for a man, as the purchase of an entire body does not. Nevertheless, the point of hypocrisy is made.)

> … opinion with Pythagoras

The Duke can see no way out of the Shylock-imposed dilemma, unless Bellario, the renowned lawyer from Padua (Portia's cousin), has some helpful opinion to offer. While they wait for a message, Shylock gets his knife ready and Gratiano bitterly berates him, saying:

> Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith,
> To hold opinion with Pythagoras
> That souls of men infuse themselves
> Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
> Governed a wolf who, hanged for human slaughter,

—Act IV, scene i, lines 130-34

Pythagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher of the sixth century b.c., believed in the transmigration of souls. There is a famous story that he once stopped an animal from being beaten because he insisted he recognized the voice of a dead friend. (I wonder if that might not have been merely a humane device to stop the beating of an animal.)

Clearly, such transmigration is counter to Christian doctrine, and for Gratiano to accept it would mean that he had wavered in his faith.

The reference to a hanged wolf may well have referred to Lopez (see page I-514), whose very name is related to the Spanish word for wolf.

> The quality of mercy.. .

Now Portia's plan reveals itself. The message from Bellario comes, brought by Nerissa in man's costume. Bellario cannot come himself but sends a young lawyer, Balthasar, in his place. Balthasar is, of course, Portia in disguise.

Portia too calls for mercy and says Shylock must be merciful. Shylock demands where in the law it says he *must* be merciful and Portia retreats, but in doing so delivers one of the most famous speeches in all of Shakespeare, one which begins:

> The quality of mercy is not strained [forced];
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath,..

—Act IV, scene i, lines 183-85

It is true, then, that one is not compelled to be merciful, but mercy doesn't require compulsion. One is merciful simply because it is so wonderful to oneself and to others to be merciful.

> Wrest once the law.. .

Shylock nevertheless refuses. He insists on the letter of the law and nothing else, crying:

> I crave the law,

—Act IV, scene i, line 205

Bassanio desperately offers ten times the original loan, and if that fails, he urges the young judge to

> Wrest once the law to your authority.
> To do a great right, do a little wrong,

—Act IV, scene i, lines 214-15

In a sense, this reflects a great philosophic struggle between Jew and Christian (as interpreted through Christian thought) between the letter and the spirit. In the New Testament the orthodox Pharisees are pictured as insisting on the letter of the law, while the more liberal Jesus is willing to bend the letter if that means retaining the spirit.

St. Paul makes this specific by saying that God "… hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

> A Daniel come to judgment …

But it is not so easy to bend the law. Venice is a commercial, trading city and must deal with a wide variety of foreigners with other customs and beliefs. Venetian law, like Venetian money, must inspire confidence and it cannot unless it is equitable and just and never bent to personal advantage.

Portia points out that to palter with the law would set bad precedents, and Shylock cries out exultantly:

> A Daniel come to judgment! Yea, a Daniel!
> O wise young judge, how 1 do honor thee!

—Act IV, scene i, lines 222-23

Daniel, in the biblical Book of Daniel, is a wise interpreter of dreams, but the reference here is to Daniel's role in the apocryphal book of The History of Susanna.

The heroine of the book, Susanna, a chaste wife, is lusted after by two wicked elders. Her virtue was proof against their ancient charms and they conspired to accuse her of adultery to punish her. They stated they had seen her intimate with a young man and the court condemned Susanna to death.

At this point Daniel, a young man at the time, entered the story (just as "Balthasar" did). He demanded the right to cross-examine the elders separately before the council. He asked each the name of the tree under which he had seen the criminal intimacy take place. Not having concerted this part of the story, they named different trees and it was plain that they were lying. Susanna was freed and the elders executed.

Of course, since Susanna is an apocryphal book and not part of the Bible in the Jewish tradition, Shylock would not be apt to refer to it in reality.

> … the stock of Barabbas

It seems that all is lost for Antonio. Shylock even refuses to pay the expense of a surgeon to help Antonio after the operation, because that is not part of the agreement (something which loses any sympathy any Elizabethan might possibly have for him).

Antonio makes a last touching speech that so moves Bassanio that he says (and, one can only believe, sincerely) that he would gladly deliver his new wife to Shylock's ruthless clutches if only that would save Antonio (and here Shakespeare's feeling of the utter nobility of male affection and its greater strength than that between man and woman shines through). Gratiano chimes in with a similar wish, and both Portia and Nerissa, in their male disguises, cannot hide the fact that such gestures sit rather poorly with them.

As for Shylock, the strong family man, he finds these remarks revolting and says:

> These be the Christian husbands! I have a daughter;
> Would any of the stock of Barabbas
> Had been her husband, rather than a Christian!

—Act IV, scene i, lines 294-96

There is scarcely a name that rings so unpleasantly in Christian ears as "Barabbas." In the New Testament, it is the name of a prisoner who was slated for execution when Jesus was. Because it was the time of Passover, Pontius Pilate offered to free a prisoner and put it up to the populace: "… Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus…" (Matthew 27:17). Since the populace demanded the release of Barabbas, Jesus was led out to crucifixion.

Matthew merely describes Barabbas as "a notable prisoner" (Matthew 27:16), but Mark says that Barabbas 'lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection" (Mark 15:7). Barabbas, in other words, had been taken after having participated in a rebellion against Rome. In the nationalistic spirit of the times one can see that to the Jewish masses Barabbas may have been a hero, but to the Christians of later times, he was a murderer whose life was unjustly traded for that of Jesus.

Marlowe in his *The Jew of Malta* called his Jew Barabbas, so that his villainy would be expressed in his very name. Shylock's remark can thus be interpreted as being a wish that Jessica had married even the worst kind of Jew (or, from the Christian standpoint, any Jew) rather than any Christian. (It is an odd point in favor of Shylock, and one rarely remarked upon, that despite what his daughter has done to him, he regrets her marriage because of his belief that a Christian would make an unkind husband. It would seem he still loves his daughter.)

Again, since Barabbas is a name that does not occur in the Old Testament, Shylock, in reality, would not have made the reference.

> … become a Christian

Shylock is ready to take his pound of flesh when suddenly Portia stops him. She turns his insistence of the letter of the law against him. There is no mention of blood in the bond and therefore Shylock must take his pound of flesh without spilling one drop of Christian blood. What's more, he must take exactly a pound, neither the tiniest fraction more or less.

It is a legal quibble, but under the circumstances, it has its logic.

Shylock finds himself caught and offers to take the three-times payment Bassanio has offered. Bassanio is willing, but Portia grimly insists on the letter of the law. Shylock asks for his bare principal, but Portia insists on the letter. Shylock offers to abandon the money altogether and even that cannot be done, for in planning to take the pound of flesh he was a foreigner seeking the life of a Venetian, and as such, half of all his goods is forfeit to Antonio and half to the state.

(Actually, if we were arguing law, then, in the existence of a statute against a foreigner seeking the life of a Venetian, the agreement to accept a pound of flesh as forfeit for non-payment of a loan to a foreigner was illegal to begin with.)

Antonio now displays his magnanimity most impressively. That half of Shylock's fortune that is to go to the state he urges be returned to Shylock on the payment of a mere fine (a suggestion first made by the Duke). That half that is to go to Antonio himself, he would turn over to Shylock's daughter, Jessica, and her Christian husband, on Shylock's death.

But then one thing more is added, which sits less well with a modern audience than with an Elizabethan one. In return for all this, Antonio sets a condition:

> … that for this favor
> He presently [immediately] become a Christian;

—Act IV, scene i, lines 385-86

The notion of forced conversion to Christianity was often justified by a verse in Luke. In a parable told in that Gospel, a man giving a feast found that his guests refused his invitation. He therefore sent his servants out to find strangers to attend the feast, and, if necessary, to make them attend by force. "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

And indeed, Christians have converted Jews and pagans at the point of a sword. (So have Moslems and, to be truthful, on at least one occasion, Jews. In the second century b.c. the Maccabean King of Judea, John Hyrcanus I, conquered the Idumeans, a non-Jewish people who lived to the south of Judea, and forced them to accept Judaism.)

The present Western liberal tradition considers such forced conversions in any direction to be abhorrent, but the Elizabethans would not find it so. To force a Jew to turn Christian was, in their view, a crowning mercy, since it rescued him from the certainty of hell and placed him on the route to salvation. Many in the Elizabethan audience may well have thought Antonio was being entirely too softhearted, and it is not impossible to suppose that Shakespeare himself wanted to do Shylock this favor out of a sneaking affection for this full-rounded villain he had managed to create. After all, Marlowe had given *his* Jew in *The Jew of Malta* an unrepentant and horrible death.

> … renew old Aeson

After the tension of the trial, there is a final act of idyllic happiness back in Belmont, where Lorenzo and Jessica are continuing their blissful honeymoon. The night is glorious and they hymn it alternately in classical allusion to sad and tragic loves, as a delicious contrast to their own happy one.

Lorenzo says:

> … in such a night
> Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
> And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents
> Where Cressid lay that night.

—Act V, scene i, lines 3-6

The tale of Troilus and Cressida was handled by Shakespeare five years after the writing of *The Merchant of Venice* (see page I-71 ff). Jessica responds:

> In such a night
> Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew,
> And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,
> And ran dismayed away.

—Act V, scene i, lines 6-9

Shakespeare had treated the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe, in burlesque form, a year or two earlier in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see page I-48).

Lorenzo says:

> In such a night
> Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
> Upon the wild sea banks, and wait her love
> To come again to Carthage.

—Act V, scene i, lines 9-12

The sad tale of Dido and Aeneas (see page I-20) is one of Shakespeare's favorites.

But then Jessica comes up with an allusion that doesn't fit at all. She says:

> In such a night
> Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
> That did renew old Aeson.

—Act V, scene i, lines 12-14

Medea was the archetype of the powerful witch in Grecian myth, a woman of passionate desires who would stop at no crime to gratify

them. She was the daughter of Aeetes, to whose guardianship the Golden Fleece (see page I-161) was entrusted. When Jason and his companions came searching for it, she fell in love with Jason and betrayed her father. She returned to Jason's kingdom with him and, according to one tale, restored the youth of Jason's old father, Aeson, by the use of her enchantments.

Medea might be included in the list of tragic loves because Jason tired of her eventually and abandoned her. In rage, she killed her own children by the faithless Jason. Still, it is odd that Jessica should refer to the tale of a woman who betrayed her father for her lover and who was regarded not as a heroine by the Greeks but as a villainess, and who came to so bad an end besides. Might we argue that Shakespeare's sneaking sympathy for Shy-lock shows itself here yet again?

… like an angel sings

Lorenzo and Jessica are interrupted by messengers reporting that Portia and Nerissa on one hand and Bassanio and Gratiano on the other are returning. (They are arriving separately; the young men don't know even yet that their wives were at the trial in masculine guise.) Yet Lorenzo cannot bear to leave the night. He says:

> Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.
> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'si
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still [always] quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
> Such harmony is in immortal souls,
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

—Act V, scene i, lines 58-65

This notion of the "music of the spheres" (see page I-199), first advanced by Pythagoras, was still extant in Shakespeare's time. The great German astronomer Johann Kepler tried to figure out the exact notes being sounded by the various planets. This was done just about the time Shakespeare was writing *The Merchant of Venice*. Could Shakespeare have heard about it and could he have been inspired by it to write this lyrical passage?

… sleeps with Endymion

Portia, returning, is also captivated by the night, saying:

> … the moon sleeps with Endymion,
> And would not be awaked.

—Act V, scene i, lines 109-10

Endymion, in the Greek myths, was a handsome prince who, asleep in a cave one night, was spied by Selene, goddess of the moon. Ravished by his beauty, she descended to the cave and kissed the sleeping youth. She wanted no more and, throwing him into a magic, eternal slumber, she returned night after night to kiss him and sleep awhile by his side.

… like Argus

Portia has returned home before her husband and gives orders that no one is to reveal the fact she has been away at all. She is ready for the last complication of the play.

After Antonio had been saved, Bassanio, in gratitude, had offered the young judge (whom he did not recognize to be his wife) some reward. She would take nothing but the ring which Portia had given him and which he had sworn not to surrender. Reluctantly, Bassanio (recognizing his debt to Antonio) gave up the ring. Doubling the fun, Nerissa made Gratiano give up his ring too.

(Surely one must see the contrast with Shylock, who would not have given up his wife's ring for anything.)

When Bassanio and Gratiano come, bringing Antonio with them, the women at once ask for the rings. Naturally, they refuse to believe their husbands' explanations and pretend to be sure the rings were given to other women.

Portia, in particular, swears that if Bassanio did give her ring to some man, as he says, then she would take that man for her bedmate. She says:

> Watch me like Argus. If you do not, if I be left alone-
> Now by mine honor which is yet mine own,
> I'll have that doctor for mine bedfellow.

—Act V, scene i, lines 230-33

(Of course she will. If she is alone, she will sleep with herself as the only person in the bed.)

Argus was a giant in Greek mythology, whose special monstrous attribute was a hundred eyes, some of which were always open (see page I-86).

But then, before the quarrel can grow more fierce than suffices to amuse the audience, the truth is revealed, Lorenzo and Jessica learn they will be Shylock's heirs, and all ends in a blaze of happiness.

19. Much Ado About Nothing

Much ado about nothing is among the pleasantest of Shakespeare's plays. It was written about 1599 and is the first of a cluster of three comedies, written in the space of a year or so, that represent Shakespeare's comic genius at its height.

… Don Pedro of Aragon …

The play opens with Leonato, the governor of Messina, speaking with a Messenger who has just brought him a letter. Leonato says:

> I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Aragon
> comes this night to Messina.

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

Messina is one of the principal cities of the island of Sicily. It is located in the northeastern comer of that triangular island just at the narrow strait that separates Sicily from Italy. As for Aragon, that is a medieval kingdom that was located in eastern Spain (see page I-526).

But what was Don Pedro of Aragon doing in Sicily?

Well, through much of the Middle Ages Sicily had been ruled by the German emperors. In 1266, however, it fell into the hands of the French dynasty of Anjou.

In 1282 the Sicilians grew tired of this Angevin rule. On March 30, just as the church bells were ringing for the sunset prayers called vespers, the Sicilians rose in concert and killed every Frenchman they could find. This event, the "Sicilian Vespers," ended Angevin rule on the island.

The last German ruler of Sicily, prior to the advent of the Angevins, had had only one surviving child, a daughter. She had married the King of Aragon, and the Sicilians considered this Aragonese King to be the natural successor to the crown. They Invited him to come to Sicily. He did so and by 1285 had established himself firmly as ruler of Sicily, beginning a dynasty that was to continue for over five hundred years.

The Aragonese King who took over in Sicily was Pedro III (also known as Pedro the Great). Naturally, he was not the Don Pedro of Aragon who figures in *Much Ado About Nothing, a* play which is

completely and entirely unhistorical. Undoubtedly, however, it was his name that floated into Shakespeare's mind when he needed one for the prince.

… a young Florentine…

It is quickly established that there has been a battle which Don Pedro has won and which has been practically bloodless. Leonato says:

/ find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed
much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio.

—Act I, scene i, lines 9-11

Florence was the leading city of Renaissance Italy, the medieval analogue of ancient Athens. Shakespeare never set the scene of one of his plays in that city, but he knew its reputation and worth. Simply by making Claudio a Florentine he was informing the audience that the man was intelligent and gallant.

… of Padua

Leonato has a daughter, Hero, beautiful and shy, and a niece named Beatrice, merry and impudent. The latter is trying to make herself heard and finally manages to say:

I pray you, is Signior Mountanto
returned from the wars or no?

—Act I, scene i, lines 29-30

Mountanto is the name of a style of fencing thrust and the implication is that the gentleman in question is a great swashbuckler, presumably a phony, whose valor is all talk.

The Messenger doesn't know whom she means and her cousin, Hero, must identify him, saying:

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

—Act I, scene i, line 34

Padua is the scene of much of the action of *The Taming of the Shrew* (see page I-447). The Messenger assures the company that Benedick is alive and well, and Beatrice breaks out at once in a flood of slander against him. Leonato feels it necessary to explain this away and says to the Messenger:

> You must not, sir, mistake my niece.
> There is a kind of merry war betwixt
> Signior Benedick and her. They never meet
> but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

—Act I, scene i, lines 58-61

And indeed, it is this "merry war" that is the heart of the play and that will keep it alive and popular forever.

> … my dear Lady Disdain …

In come the warriors, including Don Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick. There is a gracious and good-humored conversation with Leonato in the course of which Benedick carefully manages to fail to see Beatrice.

Finally, Beatrice is forced to address him and says:

> 1 wonder that you will still [always] be talking,
> Signior Benedick; nobody marks [listens to] you.

—Act I, scene i, lines 112-13

Whereupon in the most lordly way possible, Benedick turns, looks at the lady with a vague surprise, and says:

> What, my dear Lady Disdain!
> Are you yet living?

—Act I, scene i, lines 114-15

And the battle is joined.

… the Prince your brother. ..

But not quite all is merry. Among the party is a sour-visaged gentleman who has thus far said nothing. Leonato greets him too, and says:

> Let me bid you welcome, my lord;
> being reconciled to the Prince your brother,
> I owe you all duty.

—Act I, scene i, lines 149-51

He is speaking to Don John, the Prince's illegitimate brother, who has apparently been in rebellion against Don Pedro. In fact, that was what the battle was about. Don John lost, apparently ignominiously, with Claudio particularly notable on the winning side, and the loser has had to reconcile himself with his brother. No wonder he looks so sour.

Nothing of this is historical, but Shakespeare may well have thought of the name because King Philip II of Spain (who died only a year or so before *Much Ado About Nothing* was written and who had ruled Sicily) had happened to have an illegitimate brother widely known as Don John of Austria.

The historical Don John was, to be sure, nothing at all like the Don John of the play and had never rebelled against his brother. In fact, the historical Don John is best known for his victory over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto and then for his death, not long afterward, at the age of thirty-one in 1578.

… possessed with a fury. ..

Claudio has fallen in love with Hero and as is natural for a lover, he wants his friend, Benedick, to praise her. Benedick, a very sensible young man, refuses to be poetic about it. He says:

> There's her cousin, and she were not possessed with a fury,
> exceeds her as much in beauty
> as the first of May doth the last of December.

—Act I, scene i, lines 184-86

The Furies were creatures of Greek legend who were vengeful spirits that pursued those guilty of great crimes, and were probably personifications of the madness that stemmed from guilt and remorse. It is clear, though, that despite Benedick's unkind characterization of Beatrice he is very much struck by her-and we might guess that Beatrice wouldn't take so much trouble to tongue-lash Benedick if she weren't equally struck by him.

In short, the two are in love and everyone in the play and in the audience knows it-except for Beatrice and Benedick themselves.

… called Adam

Don Pedro is on Claudio's side, however, and the two of them then proceed to tease Benedick over his confirmed bachelorhood. They assure him he will fall in love and marry someday, and Benedick swears mightily that he won't, saying:

> // / do, hang me in a bottle like a cat
> and shoot at me; and he that hits me,
> let him be clapped on the shoulder
> and called Adam.

—Act I, scene i, lines 248-50

The reference is to a north English ballad, famous in Shakespeare's time, concerning three master archers who lived in a forest in the extreme north of England. These were Clym of the dough, William of Cloudesly, and Adam Bell, and any of the three might be used as a way of signifying a champion archer. In this case, it is Adam who gets the nod.

"… Benedick the married man"

Finally, Benedick's protestations reach a climax and succeed in adding a word to the language. He says that if he ever gets married, they can make a sign on which he is to be caricatured and

let them signify under my sign
"Here you may see Benedick the married man."

—Act I, scene i, lines 257-58

"Benedick" is but a slightly corrupt form of "Benedict," and either is now used with a small letter (a benedict) to signify sometimes a bachelor, sometimes a married man. The most appropriate use, however, is for a long-time bachelor who is newly married.

… his quiver in Venice

Benedick's companions are not impressed and feel that he will pay for his scorning of love. Don Pedro warns him laughingly:

… if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice,
thou wilt quake for this shortly.

—Act I, scene i, lines 261-62

Venice, as a great trading center (see page I-499), would be crowded with sailors from all lands, eager for the use of women after the Spartan life aboard ship, and the city would therefore be considered a center of sexual license.

… born under Saturn…

All is going along marvelously well. Don Pedro promises to use his influence to see to it that Claudio and Hero get married. Leonato learns of it and is delighted.

There is only one exception. Don John, the defeated brother, is miserable. His companion, Conrade, tries to cheer him up, but fails. Don John is even surprised that Conrade should try. He says:

/ wonder that thou being
(as thou say'st thou art) born under Saturn,
goest about to apply a moral medicine…

—Act I, scene iii, lines 10-12

In astrological thinking, each person is considered as having been born under the influence of a particular planet, which governs his personality in some fashion related to its own properties.

Mercury is the fastest moving of the planets, and to be "mercurial" is to be gay, volatile, and changeable.

Venus, named for the goddess of love, is related to "venereal," which can mean loving or lustful. The word has fallen out of use because of its association with diseases such as syphilis.

Mars, the ruddy planet named for the god of war, has an obvious connection with "martial."

Jupiter (Jove) is the second brightest of the planets and is named for the chief of the gods. It is considered most fortunate to be born under it and to be "jovial" is to be merry, good-natured, and sociable.

Saturn is considered to produce effects opposite to those of Jupiter. It is the slowest moving of the planets and is named for a particularly ancient god. Those born under his influence are therefore "saturnine," that is, grave, gloomy, and slow. Don John himself is portrayed as a saturnine individual.

The name "Conrade" has a connection with Sicily, by the way. The last of the German emperors to rule as King of Sicily was Conrad IV, who reigned from 1250 to 1254. His son, Conradin, attempted to retain hold over Sicily but was defeated and beheaded in 1268 by Charles of Anjou, who set up the Angevin dynasty that was to end fourteen years later in the Sicilian Vespers.

But another of Don John's companions, Borachio, comes in with the news that a match is being arranged between Claudio and Hero. Don John brightens. He feels a particular hate for Claudio, who was so prominent in the battle that defeated Don John, and if some mischief can be worked up at the young man's expense, so much the better.

> … apes into hell

Leonato is planning a masked dance that night as an amusement for the royal company he is hosting, and during the preparations, Beatrice is her usual merry self, as busily denying she will have a husband as Benedick had earlier been denying he would have a wife. She even looks forward, with some cheer, to the traditional punishment Elizabethans imagined for old maids. She will not marry and

> Therefore I will even take sixpence
> in earnest of the berrord

and lead his apes into hell.

—Act II, scene i, lines 39-41

The "berrord" is the "bearward" or animal keeper. She will accept a com from him as wages and do a job for him, which is to lead his apes into hell (see page I-454).

… Philemon's roof.. .

Don Pedro intends to take the occasion of the masked ball to smooth Claudio's path to Hero. He will dance with Hero, pretending to be Claudio. Drawing her to one side, and speaking more gallantly than Claudio himself might be able to, he will win her love for his friend.

When Don Pedro dances with Hero, she naturally tries to find out who is under the mask, and he says:

My visor is Philemon's roof;
within the house is Jove.

—Act II, scene i, lines 95-96

This refers to a tale told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (see page I-8).

Jupiter (Jove) and Mercury once traveled through Asia Minor in disguise to test the hospitality of its inhabitants. They were treated discourteously everywhere until they came to the lowly cottage of an old, poor couple, Philemon and Baucis. Their welcome there was so hospitable that they offered to grant the couple whatever their wish might be. Their only wish was that they might die together, without warning, at the same moment, so that neither should know one moment of the pain of living without the other. It was granted.

Don Pedro, in referring to himself as Jove, may be tempted at the moment to speak for himself rather than for Claudio. Indeed, Don John, for sheer mischief, will take the occasion soon to get the news to Claudio that Don Pedro had indeed spoken for himself (though, in the end, he did not).

… the "Hundred Merry Tales"…

Benedick dances with Beatrice at the ball and, under the cover of

anonymity, tells her of certain anonymous slanders he has heard concerning her. She repeats the information and guesses the informer, saying:

> That I was disdainful,
> and that I had my good wit
> out of the "Hundred Merry Tales."
> Well, this was Signior Benedick that said so.

—Act II, scene i, lines 128-30

The "Hundred Merry Tales" was a popular, and therefore well-worn, collection of funny stories, most of them coarse. It would be equivalent, in modern terms, to saying that she had gotten her witty sayings out of Joe Miller's joke book.

It was a deadly thing to say to Beatrice and in vengeance (she probably knew very well with whom she was dancing) she floods Benedick with cruel remarks which he cannot counter.

> … the infernal Ate.. .

Benedick has so much the worse of it on this occasion that after the dance he boils over with frustration, and says to Don Pedro concerning Beatrice:

> She would have made Hercules have turned spit,
> yea, and have cleft his club to make the fire too.
> Come, talk not of her.
> You shall find her the infernal Ate in good apparel.

—Act II, scene i, lines 250-54

She is such a shrew, in other words, that even Hercules would bow before her in fear.

As a matter of fact, the image is not too far removed from one of the legends concerning Hercules. As a punishment for some crime, Hercules was condemned to serve Omphale, Queen of Libya, for three years. She chose to have him do the woman's work about the house, spinning, cleaning, making beds, while she wore his lion's skin and carried his club.

As for Ate, she is the Greek goddess of vengeance and mischief, who created so much trouble even among the gods that she was cast out of heaven and condemned to live on earth, where, Benedick implies, she has taken on the likeness of Beatrice.

> … the great Cham's beard…

And when Beatrice enters, Benedick bounds to his feet at once and demands to be sent away. He says to Don Pedro melodramatically:

> Will your Grace command me any service
> to the world's end? I will go on
> the slightest errand now to the Antipodes
> that you can devise to send me on;
> I will fetch you a toothpicker now
> from the furthest inch of Asia;
> bring you the length of Prester John's foot;
> fetch you a hair off the great Cham's beard;
> do you any embassage to the Pygmies-rather
> than hold three words' conference with this harpy.

—Act II, scene i, lines 261-69

The Antipodes ("with the feet pointed opposite") is a term invented by the Greeks. When their philosophers worked out the fact that the earth was spherical, there appeared at once the odd and paradoxical situation that people might live on the other side of the earth, with their feet pointed upward (from the standpoint of the Greeks).

Since the temperature rose as one went south, some Greek philosophers suggested there was a burning zone about the equator that men could not pass and that the world of the Antipodes (the Southern Hemisphere) could never be reached.

(By Shakespeare's time this was shown to be false, but the Antipodes remained as a symbol of the distant and unattainable.)

Prester John ("John the Priest") was a mythical monarch whose existence was widely accepted in the later Middle Ages. He was supposed to be a Christian king of immense power, with wide dominions in Asia, a king who had conquered the pagan regions and converted them to Christianity (hence his title).

There were indeed Christians in the Far East. These were the

Nestorian Christians, a heretical sect that had been driven out of the East Roman Empire in the fifth century and had found haven in Persia and beyond. They penetrated to central Asia and China and, for a while in the twelfth century, were influential among the Mongol tribes who were gaining power.

In 1145 a Syrian bishop, Hugh of Gebal, brought the tale to the papal court. He spoke of a great Christian monarch in the East, thus combining a Mongol conqueror (who was not a Christian) with the Nestorians (who were not kings). In 1177 Pope Alexander III wrote a letter to this supposed Prester John, suggesting an alliance against the Moslems. The messenger carrying the letter never returned and nothing is known of his fate. Nevertheless, people continued to believe in the myth of a great Christian empire somewhere beyond the horizon.

In 1206 the greatest of the Mongols took the name of Genghis Khan, and he proved a Prester John indeed, though not a Christian one. For a bloody and unbelievable half century the Mongols expanded with unheard-of speed and built the largest continuous land empire the world had yet seen. In 1240 they even penetrated central Europe, defeating all armies sent against them.

Under Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, they reached their height. In the late thirteenth century the Italian traveler Marco Polo spent seventeen years at the court of Kublai Khan and thereafter wrote an immensely popular account of his travels. The memory of the Khans (or Chams) remained green, therefore, and it is the beard of the Mongol ruler which Benedick offers to pluck (though by Shakespeare's time only remnants of the Mongol Empire remained).

The Pygmies were a dwarfish race first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad,* and were reputed to live south of Egypt (see page I-63). The Harpies, in Greek legend, were originally symbols of the storm wind, but they were eventually pictured as winged birds of prey with women's heads. They were described as horrible, filthy creatures that snatched food away from men's tables, soiling and fouling what they could not take.

… like favorites

Having said all this, Benedick stalks off in a huff, to Beatrice's amusement. The rest of the group are happy too, as it quickly turns out that Don Pedro has wooed on his friend's behalf, and successfully. Soon there will be a wedding between Claudio and Hero.

Don Pedro, having listened to Benedick and Beatrice berate each other, suddenly thinks it would be delightful to trick them into falling in love. It is quite obvious to everyone that they are actually in love

and it is just necessary to find some face-saving way of getting each to admit it

Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio therefore seize an opportunity when Benedick is within earshot, to pretend they don't know they are being overheard, and to begin a long, circumstantial tale about Beatrice being in love with Benedick and being afraid to show it. They say that she may die of it.

Benedick is quite incredulous at first, but the three are most convincing, and, in his heart, he *wants* to believe, of course. So it comes about that he decides he can't very well let the poor girl die and he might as well save her life by loving her.

Next, Beatrice must get the same treatment. Hero and a lady in waiting, Ursula, will talk in the garden and Beatrice will be lured there to overhear them. Hero gives directions, saying that the talk will be in a shady place where the plants

> Forbid the sun to enter-like favorites,
> Made proud by princes, that advance their pride,
> Against that power that bred it,
>
> —Act III, scene i, lines 9-11

Considering the year in which the play was written, this sounds like an unmistakable reference to the Earl of Essex (see page I-120), who had been the favorite of Queen Elizabeth and who was now falling out of favor and taking it hard. Soon he was to attempt rebellion against the Queen and be beheaded for his pains.

Shakespeare was patronized by Essex and was surely sympathetic to him (see page I-119). In fact, there is every reason to suppose he did not forgive Elizabeth for executing the Earl, and when Queen Elizabeth died he remained mute, something spitefully noted by the poet Henry Chettle, who wrote an elegy in the dead monarch's honor.

And yet here is this passage in *Much Ado About Nothing.* We might suppose that Shakespeare, not one to risk his neck, or his living either, fearful that his connection with Essex might bring harm down upon his head, inserted this passage as an indication of disapproval of Essex. Such an indication might place him on the right side and out of trouble.

The girls' stratagem works and Beatrice is tricked into love out of pity, just as Benedick was.

> … they that touch pitch…

Everything is going better and better, but there is Don John even yet His earlier bit of mischief had miscarried and he wants something more effective. His companion, Borachio, has an idea. Why not frame Hero? He can arrange things so that he himself will woo Hero's lady in waiting Margaret at Hero's window. Don Pedro and Claudio will be allowed to overhear and be made to believe that Hero is a creature of light behavior who bestows her favors on anyone.

This vile plot is carried through offstage and works, but almost at once the nemesis of the plotters appears in the shape of comic constables, who mangle the English language with every sentence.

Their chief is Dogberry, epitome of the cowardly policeman who is willing to make an arrest only if there is no risk in it. Thus, when asked by a watchman whether they may arrest any thieves they encounter, Dogberry prudently says:

> Truly, by your office you may;
> but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled…

—Act III, scene iii, lines 57-58

The proverb is biblical; at least it occurs in the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus (13:1), where it is written: "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith," an analogy that warns against evil companionship.

> … a true drunkard.. .

Two newly sworn watchmen remain behind and almost at once Conrade and Borachio enter. Borachio, having successfully carried through the plot, is bubbling over with glee because he has earned a thousand ducats from Don John as a result. Borachio says to Conrade:

> Stand thee close then under this penthouse
> for it drizzles rain, and I will,
> like a true drunkard, utter all to thee.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 104-6

It is to be presumed that Don John's companions are Aragonese and speak Spanish. Shakespeare makes no point of it in the play but

Bora-chio's reference to himself as a drunkard is interesting, since the Spanish word *borracho* means just that.

> … god Bel's priests.. .

Borachio is triumphant over the ease with which appearance was mistaken for reality (Margaret at the window for Hero). Through him, Shakespeare strikes out at one of his favorite targets-changing fashion. Borachio denounces fashion for making mankind ridiculous:

> Sometimes fashioning them
> like Pharaoh's soldiers in the reechy [grimy]
> painting, sometimes like god Bel's priests in the old church window,
> sometimes like the shaven Hercules in the smirched worm-eaten tapestry…

—Act III, scene iii, lines 134-38

The new fashions only succeed, in other words, in making men look like one variety or another of ancient figures so that those fashions don't even have the virtue of being really new.

The reference to "Bel's priests" brings in another apocryphal book of the Bible. In this case it is Bel and the Dragon, in which the prophet Daniel proved to King Cyrus of Persia that the idol Bel was merely an inanimate object. The priests of Bel pretended that the idol consumed food and wine brought to it by the faithful each day, and Daniel showed that it was the priests themselves who ate and drank.

> … Count Comfect.. .

The watchmen abandon Dogberry's caution and, like valiant men, promptly arrest Conrade and Borachio. Dogberry and his chief assistant, the aged Verges, go to Leonato to acquaint him with the conspiracy against his daughter. Between their wordiness and Leonato's haste to be on with the wedding preparations, communication fails and the plot, which ought to have been scotched, is not.

At the wedding ceremony, Claudio, in the most brutal manner, scornfully refuses to accept Hero, accusing her of immorality. Sadly, Don Pedro confirms this.

Leonato is half convinced, Benedick is puzzled and confused, and Hero faints. Beatrice, of course, is instantly and entirely on the side of Hero.

The Friar, who had been performing the marriage ceremony, suggests (very much in the manner of Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet)* that the family pretend Hero is dead till the matter can be straightened out. Her supposed death will produce remorse in Claudio and Don Pedro and make them the readier to accept her innocence if the evidence points to it; while if she turns out to be really guilty, her supposed death would hide her shame and make it easier to have her quietly put in a nunnery.

Beatrice, furious, is in no mood, however, for lengthy investigations. She wants direct action. Poor Benedick, confessing his love for her, can scarcely get two words out at a time. Beatrice rages her contempt for Don Pedro and Claudio. She says:

> Princes and counties!
> Surely, a princely testimony, a goodly count.
> Count Comfect; a sweet gallant surely!

—Act IV, scene i, lines 313-15

"Comfect" is candy (as in our modern "confectionary"), and Beatrice is sneering at the fault manliness of those who could treat a young girl so cruelly.

Beatrice has only one small demand of Benedict; that he kill Claudio. Benedick doesn't want to, but he cannot stand against Beatrice's impetuous fire; gloomily, he goes off to challenge Claudio.

> … a calf's head and a capon …

Quietly Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel, out of the hearing of Don Pedro. Claudio, however, can scarcely take his old, bantering friend seriously. He insists on thinking it is some sort of joke and says to Don Pedro (who has overheard the conversation imperfectly and asks if Claudio is being invited to dinner):

> … he hath bid me to a calf's head and a capon;
> the which if I do not carve most curiously,
> say my knife's naught.
> Shall I not find a woodcock, too?

—Act V, scene i, lines 153-56

They are all items of food; but calves, capons, and woodcocks are all common symbols of stupidity too. Claudio is still wondering if Benedick is advancing some stupid joke. But Benedick insists on being grim, and stalks off after insulting Claudio unmistakably and formally leaving the service of Don Pedro.

The plot is breaking down, however. Not only does Benedick inform Don Pedro that his brother, Don John, has fled Messina (a suspicious act made necessary, presumably, by the arrest of Conrade and Borachio), but the foolish Dogberry has managed to extract a confession from the villains.

When the truth is out, Don Pedro and Claudio are prostrate with remorse and guilt. Leonato demands a simple recompense; that Claudio marry a niece of his that looks very much like the supposedly dead Hero. In deep contrition, Claudio agrees at once, and, of course, the "niece" turns out to be Hero herself. All are reconciled, right down to Claudio and Benedick.

… all Europa. ..

Now it is Benedick's turn. He will marry soon and subject himself to the dangers of the horns of cuckoldry after all. Claudio laughingly says:

> Tush, fear not, man! We'll tip thy horns with gold,
> And all Europa shall rejoice at thee,
> As once Europa did at lusty Jove
> When he would play the noble beast in love.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 44-47

There is a play on words here between Europa, meaning the continent of Europe, and Europa, the princess whom Jove loved in the shape of a bull (see page I-44).

.. .in a consumption

It comes out now that both Beatrice and Benedick had fallen in love

because each had been told the other was lovesick, but it no longer matters. Benedick saves face by saying:

> Come, I will have thee; but, by this light,
> I take thee for pity.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 92-93

And Beatrice answers (as usual) with interest:

> … by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion,
> and partly to save your life, for
> I was told you were in a consumption.

—Act V, scene iv, lines 94-96

With that, they kiss and are clearly blissfully happy. And we may presume that the marriage will stay happy too. No doubt the "merry war" between them will continue and Beatrice' sharp tongue will continue to have the better of it, but what of that?

After all, "Beatrice" means "she who makes happy" and "Benedick" means "blessed," and Shakespeare could not have chosen those names accidentally. Beatrice will make Benedick happy and he will be blessed in her.

The play ends with the news that Don John has been caught, but punishment is deferred for the next day. Nothing will interfere with the gaiety of the end.

20. As You Like It

As you like it seems to have been written about 1599, a little after Much Ado About Nothing, and is therefore the second of the cluster of Shakespeare's three joyous comedies.

In this second comedy, much of the action takes place in an idealized pastoral setting, something very popular in the period. The plot Shakespeare obtained from a pastoral romance, *Rosalynd,* published in 1590 by the English poet Thomas Lodge, and unproved it beyond measure.

… eat husks with them. ..

The story opens with Orlando and the old servant, Adam, onstage. Orlando is the youngest of three sons. His dead father has left him but a small sum for himself and has placed his bringing up in charge of the oldest brother, Oliver.

Though Oliver supports the middle brother in school, he is (for some reason Shakespeare does not bother to explain) a jealous tyrant to his youngest brother, keeping him deliberately in idleness and penury. When Oliver comes onstage, young Orlando says to him bitterly:

> Shall I keep your hogs and eat husks with them?
> What prodi gal portion have I spent that
> I should come to such penury?

—Act I, scene i, lines 36-38

This is a reference to the famous parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of St. Luke (see page II-368).

… the old Duke…

The two brothers nearly come to blows and Orlando demands the small sum coming to him so that he might leave. Oliver agrees, with ill grace, but it is in his mind to be rid of Orlando forever and without paying him any money either.

Charles, a wrestler at the court of the Duke, is there to speak to Oliver, and it is this wrestler who is to be the means whereby Oliver

will carry out his plan. Charles, asked after court news, says:

> There's no news at the court, sir, but the old news.
> That is, the old Duke is banished by his younger brother,
> the new Duke …

—Act I, scene i, lines 96-98

Who these dukes might be, and over what region they might rule, Shakespeare does not say and, certainly, does not care. In Lodge's pastoral romance, the dead father of the young hero was called Sir John of Bordeaux. That would make the scene the southwestern section of France. And indeed, the wrestler (here called Charles) is, in the source romance, serving at the court of Torismund, King of France. There was once a Toris-mund, who ruled the Germanic tribe of the Visigoths in 451, and that tribe did, indeed, control at that time southwestern France.

In Shakespeare's version, the father of Oliver and Orlando is Rowland de Boys. "Rowland" is a form of "Roland" and that name is best known as that of a Frankish warrior who died at the Battle of Roncesvalles in 778, which was fought in the Pyrenees about 130 miles south of Bordeaux. This is reminiscent of the time and place of Torismund.

That, however, is as far as it goes. The King of France is changed by Shakespeare into a Duke who is not further characterized or even named. (He is called Duke Senior in the play.) The usurping younger brother is named Frederick.

> … the Forest of Arden …

Charles goes on to say of the exiled Duke:

> They say he is already in the Forest of Arden,
> and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the
> old Robin Hood of England.
> They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day,
> and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.

—Act I, scene i, lines 111-15

If we imagine a French setting, the Forest of Arden would be the wooded region of Ardennes, straddling the modern boundary between France and southern Belgium. There is, however, an actual Forest of Arden just north of Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, and the dramatist must surely have had this at least partly in mind.

In the Forest of Arden, Duke Senior and his men are living the life of happy outlaws, in the midst of nature, eating the game they capture and not having a care in the world. This is the bucolic bliss that is conventional in pastorals, for it is common for people trapped in the hurly-burly of the crowded haunts of men to imagine (wrongly) that there is some special delight in a simple life that existed in the "good old days."

This vain imagining even made its way into many mythologies. The early Greek poet Hesiod pictured the human race as having degenerated through successive ages, each worse than the one before. The first period was the "golden age," in which men lived without care, eating acorns, honey, and milk, free of hunger and pain; to these men death was only a falling asleep. It is to this that Charles refers as "the golden world."

To the English audience, the best-known example of happy outlaws in the forest was that of Robin Hood and his band of merry men. He was originally a peasant outlaw fighting against the Norman overlords, but with time he was polished up and made more acceptable to the aristocracy. By Shakespeare's time he had been transmuted into a Norman nobleman, Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, who was unjustly dispossessed and outlawed. The resemblance between this version of Robin Hood and the case of Duke Senior makes Charles's reference a natural one.

… the little wit. ..

Charles has come to warn Oliver that it is rumored his youngest brother, Orlando, will try to wrestle him. Charles gives troubled warning that he will be forced to hurt Orlando. Oliver, however, callously urges Charles to kill Orlando rather than merely hurt him.

The scene then shifts to the court, where we find the two charming young cousins, Rosalind and Celia. Rosalind is the daughter of the exiled Duke, and Celia the daughter of the usurping one. Rosalind is kept at court, despite her father's exile, because Celia loves her so.

Celia endeavors to keep her cousin cheerful and in this is helped by the court fool, who is named Touchstone. This is a particularly significant name, for a touchstone is a hard, flinty rock upon which a soft metal like gold will leave a rubbed-off mark if drawn across it.

Pure gold and gold alloyed with varying amounts of copper can be used to make reference marks of different shades of yellow, orange, and red. If an unknown gold alloy is then rubbed across the touchstone, the mark it leaves, when compared with the standards, will reveal the amount of the copper content. As a result, "touchstone" has come to mean any criterion or standard against which the qualities of something may be tested.

To have a fool named Touchstone, then, is to indicate that it is by the encounter with the wit of a fool that the wisdom of a man may be judged.

Thus, when cautioned about the too great freedom of his remarks, Touchstone says to the girls:

> The more pity that fools may not speak
> wisely what wise men do foolishly.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 83-84

To this, Celia responds:

> By my troth, thou sayest true, for since the little wit
> that fools have was silenced, the little foolery
> that wise men have makes a great show.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 85-87

This remark has nothing to do with anything in the play and it would seem that Shakespeare was seizing the opportunity to make a cutting reference to some contemporary event. The satiric writing of Elizabethan times had grown more and more scurrilous until those jabbed at by it managed to push the government into banning such satires on June 1, 1599. Censorship, nevertheless, is almost invariably a greater evil than those it tries to cure, and Shakespeare expresses his disapproval of it here.

> … is humorous

The young ladies learn of the wrestling matches and of the apparent invincibility of Charles. Orlando is now there to take his turn at the wrestling, and both girls, but especially Rosalind, are greatly

taken with his youth and good looks.

All try to persuade Orlando not to wrestle, but he insists, and to everyone's surprise throws Charles and badly hurts him. Duke Frederick wants to know the young victor's name and is put out to find he is a son of Sir Rowland de Boys, an old enemy of his.

Later a courtier comes back to warn Orlando to leave quickly:

> … such is now the Duke's condition
> That he misconsters [misconstrues] all that you have done.
> The Duke is humorous.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 254-56

The word "humorous" refers to the humors (or body fluids) of the old Greek physicians (see page I-582), which were supposed to control the temperament. To say the Duke is "humorous" is to say that he is a creature of moods and his present mood, apparently, is a dangerous one.

> … call me Ganymede

The Duke is moody indeed, for he turns against Rosalind also. Having kept her at court ever since her father was exiled, he now bids her leave at once on pain of death, and insists on it despite Celia's wild protests.

After the Duke stalks offstage, Celia insists that she will flee with Rosalind and that together they will seek Duke Senior in the Forest of Arden. Rosalind is disturbed at the thought of two girls wandering through the wilderness and she suggests that she, at least, dress as a man (Shakespeare's favorite device in his romances).

Rosalind even takes a name for herself in her guise as man, saying to Celia:

> 7'J/ have no worse a name than Jove's own page,
> And therefore look you call me Ganymede.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 122-23

Ganymede, in the Greek myths, was a beautiful Trojan prince (see page I-67) with whom Jupiter (Zeus) fell in love. Since Ganymede was

the object of homosexual love, the name is appropriate for a young man who, being really a young lady, is bound to look and behave like an effeminate.

Celia also chooses a new name, saying to Rosalind that it will be

> Something that hath a reference to my state:
> No longer Celia, but Aliena.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 125-26

"Aliena" is Lathi and is a feminine form of the word meaning "stranger." Celia has become alienated from her father.

The two girls decide to take Touchstone with them, and leave.

> … the penalty of Adam

In the second act the scene shifts to the Forest of Arden, where Duke Senior is contentedly lecturing his followers on the advantages of the simple life:

> Here feel we not the penalty of Adam;

—Act II, scene i, line 5

For his sin in eating the forbidden fruit, Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden, where food was always at hand, and was condemned to work for his bread: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:19). Here in the Forest of Arden, however, Duke Senior and his men are living on the bounty of the earth and the Garden of Eden (another version of Charles the wrestler's "golden world") is returned.

> … like the toad…

Duke Senior finds that the cruel fate of exile has turned to good, and says:

> Sweet are the uses of adversity,
> Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;

—Act II, scene i, lines 12-14

Toads are ugly indeed, though beneficial (rather than venomous) insofar as they eat insects and help keep the numbers of those creatures under control. There existed a legend, however, that there were stony concretions in toads' heads that could be used to warn against the presence of poison if set in a ring. They did so by changing color. Such a "toad-stone" was also thought to reduce the pain and decrease the swelling that followed the bite or sting of a poisonous animal. Needless to say, despite Shakespeare, there is no such thing as a toadstone.

… caters for the sparrow

But if Duke Senior is contented, poor Orlando certainly is not. Having been warned away from court, he arrives back home only to discover that his oldest brother, Oliver, plans to kill him outright. The warning is brought to Orlando by old Adam, who urges him to leave and offers him his own life savings of five hundred crowns. Adam (who, according to tradition, was played on the stage by Shakespeare himself) says:

> Take that, and he that doth the ravens feed,
> Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,
> Be comfort to my age.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 43-45

This is a reference to Jesus' statements "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Luke 12:6) and "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them" (Luke 12:24).

But Orlando will not abandon old Adam and together they leave home and wander off toward the forest, as earlier Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone had done.

… the first-born of Egypt

Not everyone in Arden is enamored of the life. One of the Duke Senior's entourage is Jaques, whose affectation it is to be melancholy and to be cynical about everything. He sneers at a beautiful song sung by his fellow courtier Amiens, then says:

> I'll go sleep, if I can; if I cannot,
> I'll rail against all the first born of Egypt.

—Act II, scene v, lines 54-55

A possible meaning for Jaques' remark rests in the fact that the firstborn of Egypt were the victims of the tenth plague brought down upon them by God through Moses. "And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle" (Exodus 12:29).

It was after this climactic visitation that the Hebrew slaves were finally allowed to leave the country and to make their way into the wilderness. It could be that Jaques is using the phrase "all the first-born of Egypt" to symbolize the events that led to the exile of Duke Senior, and it is this against which he intends to rail.

> … the lean and slippered pantaloon

Orlando suddenly bursts in on Duke Senior, Jaques, and the others in wild desperation. Old Adam is too weak with hunger to go farther and Orlando demands food with sword drawn.

Duke Senior speaks to him gently, and Orlando, realizing he is with friends, goes off to get Adam. When the Duke uses this event to show that there are more tragic scenes on earth than their own, Jaques falls to moralizing on the general uselessness of life and of man's pilgrimage in it. Life, he says, is in seven stages that end in nothing. By the sixth, man is well advanced in age:

> … The sixth age shifts
> Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
> With spectacles on nose…

—Act II, scene vii, lines 157-59

In Shakespeare's time there had arisen the custom in Italy of having traveling bands of actors give plays in different towns. These bands developed stock characters in standard masks and costumes, and one of the most popular of the stock characters was called Pantaleone.

The name means "all lion," signifying great bravery (and is Pantaloon in its English version). Naturally it would seem funny to have "all lion," a lecherous, miserly coward, always being outwitted by the young lovers. His characteristic appearance was sufficiently well known to make it unnecessary for Jaques to do more than mention the name.

Pantaloon was always dressed in baggy trousers, by the way, which came to be called pantaloons in their turn, or, for short, "pants."

Atalanta's better part

The pastoral life in the Forest of Arden now engulfs our various characters. Touchstone matches wits with the shepherd, Corin, and easily wins. Orlando, with time now to think of the love he has conceived for Rosalind on the occasion of his wrestling match, writes verses concerning her and hangs them on the trees in approved pastoral fashion.

Rosalind in her disguise as Ganymede finds them. Celia finds them too and is reading one which describes Rosalind as made up of:

> Helen's cheek, but not her heart,
> Cleopatra's majesty, A talanta's better part,
> Sad Lucretia's modesty.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 145-48

Three of these four ladies are subjects of Shakespearean plays or poems: Helen in *Troilus and Cressida,* Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* and Lucretia in *The Rape of Lucrece.*

As for Atalanta, she was a beautiful girl whose hand was sought by many but who had vowed to live a virgin. She therefore insisted that no one marry her unless he beat her in a foot race and that if he was himself beaten his head was to be chopped off. This frightened many, and the few who risked the race were beaten by the fleet-footed Atalanta and were killed.

Finally, a youth named Hippomenes prayed to Aphrodite and was given three golden apples. He raced Atalanta and each time she began

to forge ahead he threw one of the golden apples before her. Being a woman, each time she paused to pick it up and, thanks to the time she lost, Hippomenes won.

The reference in the poem, then, is that Rosalind has Atalanta's "better part," the beauty which drew so many to court her, but not the cruelty which killed those who wooed and failed to beat her. Atalanta was a byword for fleetness. Thus, later on Jaques speaks scornfully of Orlando's retorts to his own ill-natured remarks, saying:

> You have a nimble wit. I think
> 'twas made of Atalanta"s heels.

—Act HI, scene ii, lines 273-74

> … an Irish rat …

Rosalind is very pleased at all this, but affects indifference, saying:

> I was never so berhymed since
> Pythagoras' time that I was an Irish rat. ..

—Act III, scene ii, lines 175-76

It was Pythagoras' doctrine of the transmigration of souls (see page I-535) that is here being referred to. By it, Rosalind's soul might once have inhabited the body of an Irish rat.

But what has that to do with rhyming? Well, the Celtic bards of Wales and Ireland were past masters at weaving curses into their improvised poetry. They could use such deadly verses to kill rats and other vermin. Therefore an Irish rat would be most "berhymed."

> … Gargantua's mouth…

But Celia knows who has written the verses and finally reveals that it is none other than Orlando. The excited Rosalind instantly demands to know everything about it and him and wants all the answers immediately. To which Celia, laughing, says:

> You must borrow me Gargantua's mouth first.. .

—Act III, scene ii, line 223

Gargantua was a giant of folklore, who was apparently first famous for his enormous appetite, since the name comes from *garganta,* which is Spanish for gullet. He became best known as a character in a famous satire named for him by the French humorist Frangois Rabelais. That book was first published in 1535.

… Jove's tree …

Celia says she saw Orlando under an oak tree and Rosalind says:

It may well be called Jove's tree
when it drops forth such fruit.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 234-35

The oak tree is sacred to Jupiter. Indeed, the most ancient oracle in Greece was an oak tree in Dodona, in Epirus, two hundred miles northwest of Athens. Plates and other objects of brass were suspended from the branches and these struck together when the wind blew. The sounds were then interpreted by the priests of the shrine and were delivered as oracles.

Rosalind, in her boy's disguise, manages to find Orlando and cleverly persuades him that if he is to be a truly good lover, he must practice. She offers to play Rosalind and allow nun to woo her in that fashion. (It may possibly have given Shakespeare pleasure to present scenes that were so vividly homosexual and yet done in such a way as to be inoffensive.)

… honest Ovid…

Touchstone also has fallen in love, and with a goat-herding girl named Audrey. He says to her:

/ am here with thee and thy goats,
as the most capricious poet, honest Ovid,
was among the Goths.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 6-8

Ovid had fallen into disgrace with the Emperor Augustus (see page I-389) perhaps because his erotic books spoiled Augustus' efforts to improve the morals of Rome, or because the poet assisted Augustus' dissolute granddaughter, Julia, in some particularly disgraceful intrigue.

Ovid was therefore exiled to the Black Sea town of Tomi (the present-day port of Constanta in Romania). It was far in the backwoods, among a rustic and backward peasantry, eight hundred miles from Rome. Ovid spent the last nine years of his life there, sending a stream of weepy, self-pitying letters to his family at Rome hoping they would persuade the Emperor to remit the punishment. He never did.

The inhabitants of Tomi were not Goths, but two centuries later the Goths (a Germanic tribe from the Baltic) had reached the Danube River. Tomi was therefore "among the Goths" in anticipation.

Not only does Touchstone pun on "goats" and "Goths," but he also calls Ovid capricious, a word which is derived from the Lathi *caper,* meaning goat.

Dead shepherd.. .

Still another set of lovers is Silvius and Phebe, the conventional shepherd and shepherdess of pastoral tales. In this case, Silvius is desperately in love with Phebe, but Phebe answers only with scorn.

Rosalind (as Ganymede) undertakes to right matters by scolding Phebe for being so cruel. She only makes matters worse, however, for to Rosalind's horror, Phebe is attracted to her at once in her boy's disguise. When Rosalind leaves, Phebe sighs:

Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,
"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

—Act III, scene v, lines 81-82

The line is a quotation from the poem *Hero and Leander* written by Christopher Marlowe. The poem was published in 1598, a year or so before *As You Like It* was written, but Marlowe himself had been killed in a tavern brawl in 1593 at the age of twenty-nine. Hence the reference to the "dead shepherd."

… his brains dashed out. ..

Orlando, as agreed, courts Rosalind in her disguise of Ganymede, pretending (and he thinks it is only pretense) that she is Rosalind. Rosalind deliberately eggs him on to avowals of love by pretending great cynicism in the matter. She scouts the notion that lovers would die if refused, saying:

> Troilus had his brains dashed out
> with a Grecian club;
> yet he did what he could to die before,

—Act IV, scene i, lines 92-94

Troilus, having been betrayed by his love (see page I-119), had ample reason to die of that, if men could. Yet he managed to live long enough to be killed in battle. Actually, though, he was killed by Achilles' spear and not by anyone's club.

Rosalind also sneers at the Hero and Leander tale (see page I-466), saying of Leander:

> … he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont,
> and being taken with the cramp, was drowned;
> and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it
> was "Hero of Sestos."

—Act IV, scene i, lines 97-100

> … Caesar's thrasonical brag…

Now Orlando's older brother, Oliver, enters the picture again. Duke Frederick, suspecting that his daughter and her cousin had run off with Orlando, orders Oliver to find his brother on pain of his own death.

In the forest, Oliver, sleeping, is threatened by a lioness. Orlando comes upon his brother and the beast and is tempted to leave Oliver to his fate. He cannot bring himself to do this, however, so he attacks the lioness and Oliver, awaking, witnesses the rescue. The older

brother repents his earlier wickedness and is a changed character from this moment.

He meets Celia and Ganymede and tells his story. He and Celia immediately fall in love. Rosalind/Ganymede later tells this to Orlando, saying:

> There was never anything so sudden
> but the fight of two rams and Caesar's thrasonical brag
> of "I came, saw, and overcame."

—Act V, scene ii, lines 29-31

Caesar's deliberately brief report of his battle in Asia Minor in 47 B.C. (see page II-64) was intended to display a soldierly character, since military men were supposed to be men of action and not of words. There is nevertheless a certain affectation in the way in which Caesar sought the fewest syllables.

Rosalind's characterization of it as a "thrasonical brag" makes use of too many syllables, on the other hand. "Thrasonical" means "bragging." The word comes from Thraso, a bragging soldier in *The Eunuch,* a play by the Roman dramatist Terence. That in turn comes from a Greek word meaning "overbold," which we may be sure Thraso pretended to be but was not.

> Hymen from heaven…

Now Rosalind begins to arrange everything. She makes Phebe promise to marry Silvius if it turns out she really cannot have "Ganymede." She then retires and returns in her natural woman's guise, led by none other than Hymen, the god of marriage (see page I-55), who says:

> Good Duke, receive thy daughter;
> Hymen from heaven brought her,

—Act V, scene iv, lines 111-12

The characters now pair off: Orlando with Rosalind, Oliver with Celia, Silvius with Phebe, and Touchstone with Audrey.

Only one thing is left to make everything right and that is

supplied by the sudden appearance of Orlando's remaining brother, the one in the middle. He brings the news that Duke Frederick, leading a large army against Duke Senior, has met an old hermit and has been converted to the religious life. Duke Senior may thus consider himself restored to his title, and all ends happily.

21. Twelfth Night, or, What You Will

Twelfth night is the twelfth day after Christmas-January 6. This is the traditional anniversary of the day on which the infant Jesus was viewed by the Magi and therefore the first manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles. The day is also called Epiphany, from a Greek word meaning "manifestation."

There is no biblical justification for this particular date or for any fixed number of days after the birth of Jesus for the appearance of the Magi. Nevertheless, it did afford the people in medieval times the chance of a twelve-day celebration following Christmas (hence the popular carol, "The Twelve Days of Christmas").

Twelfth Night was in some ways the climax of the festive period. In connection with this, a lawyers' guild seems to have commissioned Shakespeare in 1600 to write them an amusing play for Twelfth Night 1601. He did so and the play was called *Twelfth Night* after the occasion and not because of anything in the play itself.

It was the third of Shakespeare's joyous comedies, all written at the turning of the century, and he apparently viewed them as trifles designed for amusement only. His titles show it: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It.* Even this third play, usually called *Twelfth Night,* has a subtitle which perhaps more effectively describes Shakespeare's feeling- *What You Will.*

This was the last warm comedy Shakespeare was to write for many years. The shadows closed in and for a decade he wrote somber tragedies and bitter non-tragedies (scarcely comedies). Why this should have been so, we can only speculate. One tempting thought is that it was the execution of Essex (see page I-120), which took place just after *Twelfth Night* was completed, that darkened the light for Shakespeare.

… the food of love.. .

The setting of the play is Illyria.

In actual geography, Illyria is the coastal district of what we now call Yugoslavia and makes up the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea, just across from Italy. It never made up a prominent part of the civilized ancient world, though in the fourth century it contributed a series of great Roman emperors: Claudius II, Aurelian, Diocletian, and Constantine I.

In the seventh century invading Slavs occupied Illyria and in the fourteenth century it fell into the grip of the Ottoman Turks. In

Shakespeare's time what had once been Illyria and then became Serbia was still part of the Ottoman Empire. Parts of its coast, however, were controlled by Venice, and were Italian in culture.

Still, we need not be overconcerned with actual geography. Shakespeare's Illyria, like his seacoast of Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale* and his Forest of Arden in *As You Like It,* really exists nowhere but in the play.

It is the Duke of Illyria who speaks first. He is, apparently, lovesick, and says:

> // music be the food of love, play on,
> Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
> The appetite may sicken, and so die.

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-3

The Duke's name is Orsino, which is derived from the Latin word for "bear" and is therefore most inappropriate for the overcultivated, over-refined Duke of this play. However, at the time the play was being written, Queen Elizabeth I of England was expecting an Italian visitor, Don Virginio Orsino, Duke of Bracciano (a town twenty miles northwest of Rome). Perhaps Shakespeare was offering the name as a delicate compliment to the Italian guest.

> … fell and cruel hounds

The Duke is apparently hopelessly in love with Olivia, a rich noblewoman of Illyria, and cannot be diverted from his sentimental melancholy. When it is suggested that he hunt the hart (that is, stag) he breaks into a self-pitying play upon the word, saying that when he saw Olivia:

> That instant was I turned into a hart,
> And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
> E'er since pursue me.

—Act I, scene i, lines 22-24

This is a reference to the tale of Actaeon (see page I-406), who was turned into a stag by the angry Diana and was then killed by his

own hounds.

… like Anon. ..

Meanwhile, on the Illyrian seacoast, Viola, a young lady, appears. With her are a ship's captain and his sailors. They have just survived a wreck in which the girl's twin brother has apparently been lost.

Viola is heartsick over her brother's death, but the Captain says he saw her brother tie himself

> To a strong mast that lived upon the sea;
> Where, like Arion on the dolphin's back,
> I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves
> So long as I could see.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 14-17

Arion is a character out of Greek legend. He was a master musician at the court of Periander, tyrant of Corinth, about 600 b.c. He traveled to Sicily to compete in a musical contest, winning the prize and many rich gifts.

On the ship back to Corinth, the sailors decided to kill Arion and appropriate those gifts. He asked permission only to play and sing one last time and, having done so, jumped into the sea and the ship sailed on.

The music had, however, attracted a school of dolphins, and on the back of one of these, Arion was brought to Corinth faster than the ship could be rowed. At Corinth, Arion told his story and when the ship arrived, Periander had the sailors executed.

Be you his eunuch…

Viola is heartened by the news, but there is still the problem of what she is to do next. As an unattended maiden, she would be in great danger, so once again Shakespeare uses the device of a girl dressed in a man's clothes. As a man, she decides to seek employment in Duke Orsino's service. The Captain approves and says:

Be you his eunuch, and your mute I'll be;

—Act I, scene ii, line 62

This is a stab at realism. A girl dressed in men's clothing would, in real life, give herself away with her hairless cheeks, her shrill voice, and her mincing ways. All these would fit a eunuch.

Eunuchs were common in the East, and even in the West were valued in Italy for their high singing voices. The use of eunuchs in the papal choir was continued well into the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Viola as a eunuch would not be fitted for the romantic role she is to have in the play, and the device of eunuch and mute is dropped at once and there is no mention of either at any later point in the play.

… born under Taurus

The next scene is in the house of Olivia, the unresponsive object of Orsino's affection.

In the house we meet Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, who sponges off her and off anyone else he can find. "Toby" is a diminutive of "Tobias" and "Belch" is descriptive of his tippling habits. With him is Maria, one of Olivia's women, and entering the scene almost immediately is Sir Andrew Aguecheek. (The name indicates his cheek has the habit of trembling, as though with ague or chills, but actually out of fear.) He is there because Sir Toby is encouraging him to court Olivia, meanwhile helping himself to the money the poor fellow has.

Toby makes merciless fun of Sir Andrew, who never penetrates any mockery at his own expense. Thus, when Andrew boasts of his dancing ability, Toby encourages him to caper about, saying:

What shall we do else?
Were we not born under Taurus?

—Act I, scene iii, lines 134-35

This is a reference to the zodiac, so important to the pseudo science of astrology. There are twelve signs (constellations or star configurations) in the zodiac, which girdles the sky, and the sun spends one month in each of them.

Apparently Sir Toby and Sir Andrew were both born in the month (April 20 to May 21) when the sun was in Taurus the Bull and were therefore born "under Taurus." Each sign is supposed to have a vast number of significances and is, as an example, supposed to govern a

particular part of the body. When Andrew suggests that Taurus presides over sides and heart, Toby says:

> No, sir; it is legs and thighs.
> Let me see thee caper.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 137-38

Naturally, if Taurus presides over legs and thighs, those born under Taurus must be great dancers.

> … what says Quinapalus…

Also at Olivia's house is a Clown named Feste, which is very much like the Italian word for "holiday" and may be an oblique reference to the fact that the play was written to celebrate a holiday.

He has been absent without leave, and he is warned by Maria that he may be discharged. The Clown must therefore win over Olivia and he muses over methods for doing so, saying to himself:

> For what says Quinapalus?
> "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit."

—Act I, scene v, lines 34-35

It is useless to try to find Quinapalus in a reference book; the name is invented. The Clown apparently has had an education and it is his particular comic device to speak in pseudo-learned jargon. (This would appeal particularly to the lawyers who had commissioned the play.)

> … such a barren rascal

The Clown does indeed amuse Olivia and win her forgiveness, but one member of her staff remains untouched. He is Malvolio (his name means "ill will," the opposite of Benvolio, see page I-477, in *Romeo and Juliet),* who is Olivia's capable steward and hard-working business manager.

Malvolio is humorless, austere, proud, and easily angered. The Clown's wit does not amuse him; it merely offends. He says:

I marvel your ladyship
takes delight in such a barren rascal.

—Act I, scene v, lines 82-83

Malvolio is Shakespeare's notion of a Puritan, and, indeed, he is referred to as one later in the play.

The Protestant Reformation, which began to affect England in the reign of Henry VIII (see page II-783), settled down at last into a typical English compromise under Elizabeth I. There remained those men of Protestant persuasion, however, who were dissatisfied with the compromise and demanded that the English church be purified of those remnants of Catholicism which it possessed.

These demanders of purification came to be called Puritans, and they grew more prominent throughout Elizabeth's reign, although she remained strong enough to refuse to give in to them even when they gained control of Parliament.

The Puritans were self-consciously virtuous men who were equally conscious of the vices of those who disagreed with them. Stalwartly against serious forms of immorality, vice, and crime, Puritans tended to be just as stalwartly against trivial forms of these same things. By wasting their efforts on inconsequentials, they antagonized many who would have been willing to join the assault on important issues. Furthermore, then- pride in virtue was such that anyone was delighted when a Puritan was caught in sin, and it became easy to equate Puritanism with cant and hypocrisy.

Indeed, Olivia's retort to Malvolio's complaint about the Clown is a reflection of the common attitude toward the Puritan. She says:

O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio,
and taste with a dis tempered appetite.

—Act I, scene v, lines 90-91

Shakespeare, as a professional dramatist and actor, had a specific grudge against Puritans, since they denounced the theater as a haunt of sin and vice and an encouragement to idleness. It was their intention to close down the theaters if they could, and a professional dramatist and actor like Shakespeare could scarcely be expected to show Puritanism anything but hostility in consequence.

… Sebastian of Messaline. ..

Meanwhile Viola has taken employment with Orsino under the name of Cesario and promptly falls in love with the Duke. As for Orsino, he takes a liking to the "young man" and uses him to carry a message to Olivia.

Viola/Cesario carries the message to Olivia but in such a way as to make the Duke something less than impressive. Olivia is, however, favorably impressed with the "young man" and begins to show an affection which Viola/Cesario naturally finds horrifying.

While that happens, Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, turns out to have survived the wreck after all. He has clung to the mast till picked up by another ship, whose captain, Antonio, takes a strong liking to the young man. Antonio's attitude is, in fact, even more marked than that of the other Antonio (in *The Merchant of Venice)* toward Bassanio, and is more clearly homosexual.

Once both are on the Illyrian coast, Sebastian abandons a pseudonym he has been using (why, we are not told) and identifies himself, saying:

> You must know of me then, Antonio,
> my name is Sebastian, which I called Roderigo.
> My father was that Sebastian of Messaline
> whom I know you have heard of.

—Act II, scene i, lines 16-19

It is useless to search for Messaline. There is no such place. Either Shakespeare negligently made up a name or else, more likely, it is a printer's error that has been preserved ever since (because actually it makes no difference).

If it is a misprint there are two possibilities for what the place may have been. It may have been Messene, a Greek city in the southwestern Peloponnesus, about 360 miles southeast of the Illyrian coast; or Messina in Sicily, an almost equal distance southwest of it, and the scene of the action in *Much Ado About Nothing* (see page I-545).

Sebastian takes his leave of Antonio, for he is bound for Orsino's court, where (unknown to him) his sister is. The court is dangerous for Antonio, who has gained the Duke's enmity, but his affection for Sebastian is so strong that he follows him anyway.

… the four elements

The scene shifts to Olivia's house again, where late at night Sir Toby and his friends are having a rousing time. Sir Toby engages in mock-scholarly arguments with the foolish Sir Andrew, saying:

> Does not our lives
> consist of the four elements?

—Act II, scene iii, lines 9-10

The ancient Greek philosophers sought to find out the basic substance ("element") out of which the earth was constructed. Different philosophers had different candidates for the post, and Empedocles of Acragas finally suggested, about 450 B.C., that there was more than one. Four, altogether, were named: earth, water, air, and fire, and out of these all the earth was constructed. A century later Aristotle adopted this view and fixed it in human thought for two thousand years.

The view did not begin to go out of fashion till half a century after Shakespeare's death, and we still today speak of the "raging of the elements" when we talk of wind and water being lashed to fury by a storm over the ocean.

Malvolio comes in at length, to scold them for the noise they are making, and Sir Toby answers him with spirit, in the fashion that all fun-loving, but not really wicked, people might use to counter the self-righteous. He says to Malvolio:

> Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous,
> there shall be no cakes and ale?

—Act II, scene iii, lines 114-15

It is after he leaves that Maria says of him:

> Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan.

—Act II, scene iii, line 140

… Penthesilea

Maria describes the most prominent component of Malvolio's character to be a monstrous self-pride and suggests that they work up a plan to take advantage of that. She will imitate Olivia's handwriting and drop notes in places where he can find them so that he will be misled into thinking Olivia is in love with him. He will then, Maria is sure, promptly make a most enormous ass of himself.

Toby is absolutely delighted, and when she leaves, he calls after her:

Good night, Penthesilea.

—Act II, scene iii, line 177

Penthesilea in the Greek legends was an Amazon. According to some of the tales, she was the younger sister of Hippolyta, whom Theseus had married (see page I-18). It was Penthesilea who killed Hippolyta in the Amazonian war of revenge against Theseus, and afterward she joined the Trojans in their war against the Greeks and was killed in turn by Achilles.

Clearly, an Amazon is bound to be a large and muscular woman, and Penthesilea particularly so, since she fought with credit against Achilles himself. But Maria, it is clear in several places in the play, is a particularly small girl, which gives Toby's remark its humor.

… green and yellow melancholy

Duke Orsino, who intends to continue to use Viola/Cesario as his messenger to Olivia, talks of love to the "young man." Viola/Cesario sadly tells her love to Orsino, pretending it is her sister she is speaking of, and saying:

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i'th'bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And, with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

—Act II, scene iv, lines 111-16

There is a glancing reference here to the doctrine of the four humors, first advanced by the school of Greek physicians who followed the famous Hippocrates of Cos (of the fifth century b.c.).

They believed that there were four fluids, or "humors," in the body: phlegm, blood *(sanguis* in Latin), bile *(chole* in Greek), and black bile *(melanchole* in Greek).

Bile is the secretion of the liver and there is only one variety, a greenish-yellow fluid. On standing, it grows much darker and becomes almost black; hence the distinction between bile and black bile.

The Greek physicians elaborated the theory that the predominance of one fluid over the other resulted in a particular type of temperament or "humor" (see page II-424). There were people who were phlegmatic, sanguine, choleric, or melancholic.

The expression "green and yellow melancholy" refers to the fact that bile was supposedly predominant in the melancholic, though Shakespeare is thinking of ordinary bile, rather than black bile.

… a bearbaiting. ..

At Olivia's house, the plot to catch Malvolio progresses. A new character enters, Fabian. He is another of Olivia's servants and he too has a grudge against Malvolio. He says:

> You know he brought me out o'favor
> with my lady about a bearbaiting here.

—Act II, scene v, lines 6-7

In bearbaiting, a bear is tied to a stake, and sometimes muzzled. Dogs are then set on it and the "sport" consists in watching the maddened bear slowly tortured to death, usually killing a few dogs on the way. It was very popular in the time of Elizabeth I, and in 1575 thirteen bears were baited with the Queen an interested spectator. This "amusement" was not finally outlawed in England till 1835.

Apparently Fabian had organized a bearbaiting, and Malvolio had complained of it to Olivia, whose soft heart had been touched and who had been angry with Fabian in consequence.

This is a reflection of the fact that the Puritans, to their great credit, strove to have bearbaiting made illegal. (There were, however,

not wanting those who said, cynically, that Puritans were against bearbaiting not because it gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.)

… Jezebel

Malvolio now enters the trap. The letter has been planted in the garden, and the plotters hide in a tree watching Malvolio. The steward is so lost in self-conceit that he dreams of marriage with Olivia and begins to assume the airs of a great lord. Sir Toby is almost choked with indignation, and Sir Andrew, imitating Toby, cries out:

Fie on him, Jezebel.

—Act II, scene v, line 41

Jezebel was the idolatrous Queen of Israel, wife of wicked King Ahab. She is a byword for pride. When her son (the successor of Ahab) was killed by the revolutionary general Jehu, she met the murderer in her palace as a queen should. Though facing death, she dressed herself like a queen and taunted Jehu with a past revolution that had failed. Or, as the Bible puts it (2 Kings 9:30-31), "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?"

Of course, Sir Andrew's use of the name is inappropriate from the standpoint of sex; for a man, however proud, can scarcely be a Jezebel; and his simplicity is designed to raise a laugh in the audience.

… the impressure her Lucrece …

Malvolio eventually spies the letter, picks it up, and examines it. The handwriting on the outside seems Olivia's and the seal which closes the fold has Olivia's imprint. Malvolio describes it as:

… the impressure her Lucrece,
with which she uses to seed.

—Act II, scene v, lines 94-95

A person of quality would use a particular stamp (perhaps engraved on a ring) to impress the drop of wax sealing a letter, as

further indication of ownership and guard against forgery. Olivia uses a representation of the Roman matron Lucretia, concerning whom (see page I-205) Shakespeare had written *The Rape of Lucrece* some six or seven years before. Of course, Maria had made use of her mistress' seal.

… from the Sophy

Malvolio interprets the letter exactly as pleases his self-love. It advises him to do just the sort of thing Maria knows Olivia loathes. He is told to smile constantly, to be haughtier and surlier than ever, to talk politics, cultivate eccentricity, wear yellow stockings, and be cross-gartered. He swears to do it all, and when he leaves, Fabian, in the tree, half dead with suppressed laughter, says:

> I will not give my part of this sport
> for a pension of thousands to be paid from the Sophy.

—Act II, scene v, lines 181-82

The "Sophy" is the title given in England to the Persian Shah (see page I-521). In 1599, not long before *Twelfth Night* was written, Sir Anthony Shirley came back from Persia, laden with gifts from the Shah for his role in helping reorganize the Persian army. This remark of Fabian's, therefore, is a topical reference.

As for Toby, he is so delighted with the working out of the plan that he offers to follow Maria

> To the gates of Tartar, thou
> most excellent devil of wit.

—Act II, scene v, lines 207-8

By Tartar is meant Tartarus, the level below Hades where evil souls were tortured for their sins (see page I-13).

Cressida was a beggar

Viola/Cesario has come to Olivia's for another interview on behalf of the Duke. She exchanges wit with the Clown and then gives him a coin. The Clown promptly asks, in literary style, for another:

/ would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir,
to bring a Cres sida to this Troilus.

—Act III, scene i, lines 52-53

This refers to the famous tale Shakespeare was soon to put to use in his own *Troilus and Cressida.* Viola/Cesario gets the allusion and commends the begging, whereupon the Clown instantly points out that:

Cressida was a beggar.

—Act III, scene i, line 56

A late sequel to the medieval tale explained how Cressida was punished for betraying Troilus. She was stricken with leprosy and became a diseased beggar. Shakespeare did not use this part of the tale in his own treatment (see page I-124), but this line is evidence enough that he knew of it.

… music from the spheres

In the second interview, Olivia is bolder than in the first. She says, when Viola/Cesario speaks of the Duke:

I bade you never speak again of him;
But, would you undertake another suit,
I had rather hear you to solicit that
Than music from the spheres.

—Act III, scene i, lines 109-12

This is another Shakespearean reference to the Pythagorean doctrine of the music of the spheres (see page I-199). Despite Olivia's invitation to speak for himself, Viola/Cesario has no option but to flee.

… a Dutchman's beard…

Olivia's love for Viola/Cesario does not go unnoticed, however. The foolish Sir Andrew is not so foolish as to fail to see it, and, petulantly, he decides his own suit is useless and prepares to leave.

Toby and Fabian, unwilling to let go their profitable gull, try to argue him out of this first sensible decision he has made. They assure him that Olivia is only trying to make him jealous and that Sir Andrew is losing out only because he isn't a daring enough lover. Sir Toby says:

> … you are now sailed into the North
> of my lady's opinion, where you will hang
> like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard
> unless you do redeem it by some
> laudable attempt either of valor or policy.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 26-30

To sail into the north of a lady's opinion is a clear metaphor representing her growing coldness. It is also a topical reference. Between 1594 and 1597 there was the most spectacular attempt man had yet seen to explore the Arctic regions. The Dutch explorer Willem Barents had sailed northeastward, discovering Spitsbergen in 1596 and exploring the coasts of the large Siberian islands of Novaya Zemlya. He spent the whiter of 1596-97 in the Arctic, the first non-Eskimo to do so. He died in 1597 on his return voyage and in his honor that stretch of water lying between Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlya is known as the Barents Sea. There is no doubt but that the "Dutchman" in Sir Toby's speech is a reference to Barents.

> .. .be a Brownist. ..

Given the choice between valor and policy, Sir Andrew (equally pathetic in both) chooses valor as the manlier. He says:

> / had as lief be a Brownist
> as a politician.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 32-33

This is another sneer at Puritanism. The Brownists were followers of Robert Browne, who was such an extreme Puritan he felt he had to leave the Church of England altogether. He founded an independent church hi 1580 and in 1582 went off into exile to the Netherlands.

The Brownists were to form an interesting part of American history. Some of them, who had made a new home for themselves in Dutch exile, felt they could not maintain their English identity there and determined to establish a colony in the New World. In 1620, four years after Shakespeare's death, they sailed westward and landed in Plymouth, becoming America's revered Pilgrim Fathers.

… the bed of Ware.. .

Pleased with Sir Andrew's decision to be valiant, Sir Toby mischievously urges him on to write a challenge to Viola/Cesario. He tells him to write

> … as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper,
> although the sheet were big enough for the bed
> of Ware in England…

—Act III, scene ii, lines 47-49

Ware was a market town about twenty miles north of London which in Shakespeare's time was famous for a huge bed, eleven feet square, reportedly capable of allowing twelve people to sleep on it at once. It was in several different inns in the vicinity at one time or another and in 1931 finally came into the possession of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

… the augmentation of the Indies

This new practical joke has scarcely been placed under way when the old one regarding Malvolio reaches a climax. Maria comes in to say that Malvolio has fulfilled all the requests of the letter; yellow stockings, cross-garterings, and all, down to the perpetual smiling:

> He does smile his face
> into more lines than is in the new map
> with the augmentation of the Indies.

—Act III, scene ii, lines 78-80

Mariners were particularly interested in marking a rhumb line on a map that would indicate the shortest distance from one point to another. On the globe, such a line would be a curve spiraling northward or southward.

In 1568 the Flemish geographer Gerhard Kremer (better known by the Latinized version of his last name, Mercator) put out a map of the world plotted in such a way that the rhumb lines were straight. Maps for navigation based on Mercator's scheme could be easily marked with rhumb lines, and many of them were therefore put in, crossing and crisscrossing.

What's more, the sixteenth-century explorations had led to an increasingly detailed knowledge of the Americas ("The Indies"), and about the time that *Twelfth Night* was being written, a new map, with numerous rhumb lines, was published, showing the New World in far greater and more accurate detail than had ever been shown before. This added detail was the "augmentation of the Indies."

… Jove, not I …

Maria tells Olivia that Malvolio seems to be raving, and when he appears on the scene, grotesquely clothed and quoting meaningfully from the letter, Olivia, flabbergasted, can only think he really is mad.

Malvolio is so far gone in self-delusion, however, that he interprets everything in the light of Olivia's supposed love for him, and in the midst of his triumphing, he remembers to be pious, saying:

> Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this,
> and he is to be thanked.

—Act III, scene iv, lines 87-88

This is undoubtedly intended to mock Puritan sanctimoniousness, and, just as undoubtedly, the real Malvolio would have said "God" or "the Lord" or "the Almighty." Growing Puritan strength, however, in later years clamped down on references to God on the stage, and this form of ridiculous censorship led to the foolish substitution of "Jove."

… Legion himself …

Sir Toby conies fussing in, full of mock concern over Malvolio's madness, and saying:

If all the devils of hell be drawn in little,
and Legion himself possessed him,
yet I'll speak to him.

—Act III, scene iv, lines 89-92

This is a reference to one of the examples of demonic possession in the New Testament. When Jesus asks the name of the "unclean spirit" possessing a man, that spirit answers "My name is Legion: for we are many" (Mark 5:9).

… like cockatrices

Toby baits Malvolio with his supposed madness and when the latter rushes off in a fury, Toby arranges to have him placed in a dark room because of his supposed madness, so that the practical joke may continue.

Meanwhile the affair of Sir Andrew and Viola/Cesario is developing further. Sir Andrew has written a cautiously phrased and clearly cowardly letter. Sir Toby accepts it gravely, but does not deliver it. He intends to deliver a challenge verbally, enormously exaggerating Sir Andrew's fire-eating propensities. He will then report with equal exaggeration to Sir Andrew, concerning what a raging fury Viola/Cesario is in. He says:

This will so fright them both that they
will kill one another by the look, like cockatrices.

—Act III, scene iv, lines 203-4

The cockatrice is the fabulous serpent which can kill by his mere glance (see page I-150).

… in Lethe steep

There now begins a series of mistakings very like those in *The Comedy of Errors,* complicated by difference in sex.

Antonio, the captain who has befriended Sebastian, has given him a purse of money to use, then follows him to keep an eye on him and

guard him…

Meanwhile, Viola/Cesario, coming for another interview with Olivia, is waylaid by Sir Toby, who delivers Sir Andrew's challenge. The frightened Viola/Cesario finds he must fight the frightened Sir Andrew, but before anything can happen, Antonio comes charging in.

Assuming that Viola/Cesario is Sebastian, he is about to begin a fight in good earnest, when the Duke's officers come in to arrest him on the old charge of piracy. Antonio must ask Viola/Cesario to return his bag of money, for a fine may save his life. Naturally, Viola/Cesario knows nothing about the money, and Antonio is greatly upset over this seeming perfidy as he is dragged away.

And Sebastian too has his share of the confusion. Olivia encounters him, thinks he is Viola/Cesario, and begins to speak of love. Sebastian finds this entirely to his liking and says:

> … I am mad, or else this is a dream.
> Let fancy still [always] my sense in Lethe steep;
> If it be thus to dream, still [always] let me sleep!

—Act IV, scene i, lines 61-63

Lethe was the name of one of the rivers of Hades, according to Greek mythology. All spirits were forced to drink of it, for it had the property of inducing forgetfulness so that past life on earth vanished from memory and only the spirit world remained. Sebastian is wishing, then, to forget his past existence and to live only in the present one, in which beautiful loving women appear from nowhere.

> … King Gorboduc…

But the Malvolio affair is not yet done. Malvolio is now locked in a dark room and Sir Toby plans a further torment. He will have the Clown personify a curate, "Sir Topas," who will pretend to examine Malvolio.

The Clown demonstrates his skill at the part by talking a little learned-sounding gibberish. He says:

> … as the old hermit of Prague,
> that never saw pen and ink,
> very wittily said to a niece
> of King Gorboduc, "That that is is."

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 13-16

Gorboduc was a legendary king of early Britain, and in 1562 he was the subject of a play written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville. In this play, Gorboduc divided his kingdom between two sons, Ferrex and Por-rex, and civil war followed. It was the first blank-verse tragedy published in England and began the cycle of drama that culminated so rapidly in the Shakespearean climax.

> … the Egyptians in their fog

The Clown now begins the discussion with Malvolio through the closed door and is merciless. He insists the room in which Malvolio has been locked is not dark and that it is only the latter's mad imagination that makes it seem dark. The Clown says:

> … there is no darkness
> but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled
> than the Egyptians in their fog.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 43-45

The "fog" spoken of here is the ninth plague brought down on Egypt by Moses prior to the Exodus. It is mentioned in Exodus 1:22-23: "And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days."

> … the opinion of Pythagoras.. .

Malvolio, maintaining his sanity firmly, offers to answer any questions. The Clown asks:

> What is the opinion of Pythagoras
> concerning wild fowl?

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 51-52

Malvolio answers:

That the soul of our grandam
might happily inhabit a bird.

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 53-54

This is another Shakespearean reference to the Pythagorean theory of transmigration of souls (see page I-535), and is a perfectly correct answer.

… from Candy

By now Duke Orsino has grown tired of sending to Olivia fruitlessly and decides to go himself. When he reaches Olivia's house, he is met by his officers, who bring the sea captain Antonio to judgment.

The first officer says:

Orsino, this is that Antonio
That took the Phoenix and her fraught [cargo] from Candy;
And this is he that did the Tiger board
When your young nephew Titus lost his leg.

—Act V, scene i, lines 60-63

There is an unobvious reference here to the island of Crete. Crete has been a Greek-speaking island throughout history and in the early Middle Ages the largest city upon it was named Herakleon. In 826 Crete was captured by Moslems, who built a fortress on the site of the city and called it Khandax.

In 1204 the Venetians took the island and to them Khandax became Candia (and to the English, Candy). Since Candia was the largest city in Crete, it gave the name to the entire island. (Within the last century the island has become Greek again, taken back its own name, and its largest city is back almost to what it was-Iraklion).

In Shakespeare's time Venice and the Ottoman Turks were in a state of chronic warfare over the eastern islands, including Crete, and so there is this vague reference to some sort of battle in which Crete is named.

… th'Egyptian thief.. .

Mix-ups continue. Antonio denies he was a pirate but claims his deeds to have been lawful acts of war. However, he accuses Viola/ Cesario of ingratitude and the latter desperately denies knowledge of what the captain is talking about.

To make matters worse, Olivia enters. She has married the delighted Sebastian and now thinks Viola/Cesario is he and claims her lovingly. Orsino, seeing that his servant has won the heart he himself could not, is furious and is almost moved to murder. He says:

> Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
> Like to th'Egyptian thief at point of death,
> Kill what I love?

—Act V, scene i, lines 117-19

"Th'Egyptian thief" is a character in a romance, *Ethiopica,* by Helio-dorus, a Greek author of the third century b.c. It is the earliest Greek romance that has survived and follows a pair of lovers, Theagenes and Charicleia, through innumerable adventures. At one point an Egyptian bandit, Thyamis, kidnaps Charicleia, whom he hopelessly loves, and when he is besieged, he tries to kill her in the darkness so that if he cannot have her, no one else can. He misses his mark, Charicleia survives, and the story reaches a happy ending.

It was translated into English in 1569 and was popular enough to ensure that Shakespeare's audience would get the allusion without trouble.

> … a bloody coxcomb …

Olivia claims Viola/Cesario as her husband and the mix-up is growing dangerous for the latter, when in comes a bleeding Sir Andrew. He and Sir Toby have mistaken Sebastian for Viola/Cesario and attacked him. They were well banged as a result. As the sniveling Sir Andrew says:

> H'as broke my head across, and has given
> Sir Toby a bloody coxcomb too.

—Act V, scene i, lines 175-76

The coxcomb, from the object worn on a fool's head (see page II-17), gradually came to be a familiar appellation for the head.

Toby comes on the scene too, bleeding and deeply humiliated. Then comes Sebastian, and his appearance solves the entire mix-up at once. Even Antonio understands, and we can be sure he will not be seriously punished.

I'll be revenged. ..

The Duke now discovers that Viola/Cesario is a girl and that she loves him. He asks to see her in her woman's clothing and she replies that that clothing is with the Captain who brought her on shore and he is in prison through the action of Malvolio. (This is the first mention of any such thing. The reason for Malvolio's action is not explained, nor for Viola's failure to do anything about it. It is clearly an afterthought.)

Nevertheless, it gives an excuse to bring in Malvolio. The joke at his expense is explained and all agree he has been ill used. He is not mollified, however, but instead goes snarling off, his last words being:

I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!

—Act V, scene i, line 380

To be sure, Olivia expresses her sympathy again after he leaves and the Duke sends after to have him pacified and brought back, but that last line stands.

If Malvolio represents Puritanism, Shakespeare's insight was not wrong. Puritans *were* revenged on the theater. They continued to grow stronger until, under their leadership, Parliament rose in revolt against King Charles I in 1642. After years of fighting, the Puritans and their allies won a final victory in 1648 and the King was executed in 1649. Malvolio, in the person of Oliver Cromwell, controlled England and the theaters were closed down.

In 1660, to be sure, with Cromwell dead, the son of Charles I was brought back from exile and was made King Charles II. There followed a time of gaiety and frivolity and the stage was given over to "Restoration comedy"-mere froth and not even an echo of Shakespeare.

22. All's Well That Ends Well

All's well that ends well was written about 1602. Though it ends happily and is therefore technically a comedy, it lacks a carefree fun and happiness of the previous comedies. It is, indeed, rather an unpleasant play, like *Troilus and Cressida* (see page I-71), which was written shortly before.

… my son.. .

The play opens with a group of people dressed in mourning onstage. The first to speak is the Countess of Rousillon, who has recently lost her husband (hence the mourning). She has fresh cause for sorrow, too, and says:

> In delivering my son from me
> I bury a second husband.

—Act I, scene i, lines 1-2

What's happening is that her son, Bertram, the young Count of Rousillon, is going to Paris to be brought up at the court of the King of France and his mother hates to part with him.

Rousillon is treated in this play as part of France, and indeed (as Rous-sillon-the French use two *s's),* so it is-today. It is located just north of the Pyrenees at their eastern edge adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea. Its chief city is Perpignan.

Through much of its history, however, it was *not* part of France. While the Pyrenees are the general boundary between France and Spain, Rousillon was, from 1172 on, part of the kingdom of Aragon (see page I-526), located just south of the mountains.

It was not till 1450 that France was sufficiently united and sufficiently free of the English menace (see page II-562) to turn its attention to the spread of Spanish power across the mountain range. King Louis XI of France (see page II-651) sent expeditions southward and Rousillon became French in 1465. In 1493, however, Louis' son, Charles VIII, more interested in invading Italy, handed Rousillon back to Aragon to win Aragonese good will for his venture.

By that time Aragon had formed a union with Castile, and modern Spain had taken shape. Spain was at the height of its power

then and held on to Rousillon till 1659, at which time it became permanently French.

Thus, when *All's Well That Ends Well* was written, Rousillon was Spanish, not French. Shakespeare obtained his plot from one of the tales in the *Decameron* by Boccaccio, which dealt with Beltram of Rossiglione. But the *Decameron* was published in 1353 and at that time Rossiglione (which, presumably, is Rousillon) was Aragonese, not French, and yet Boccaccio portrayed Beltram as a Frenchman.

Not that it's important, of course, for as far as the play is concerned, Rousillon might have been any other name-an imaginary one, for that matter.

> … the King …

An elderly lord, Lafew, reassures the Countess, saying:

> You shall find of the
> King a husband, madam; you, sir, a father,

—Act I, scene i, lines 7-8

It is useless to try to find out who the King of France is. No actual King of France unmistakably fits the events in the play, and he is not named either in this play or in the *Decameron* source.

It turns out that the King is suffering from a lingering, chronic disease and that cure is despaired of. One medieval French king who did suffer from a lingering, chronic disease was Charles VI (see page II-464), who reigned from 1380 to 1422 and was mentally ill most of the time. There is no other comparison, however, and we might as well accept the fact that the King, as well as everything else in the play, is fictional.

> … Gerard de Narbon

The Countess regrets the death of a physician so skilled that he might surely have cured the King. She tells Lafew:

> He was famous sir, in his profession,
> and it was his great right to be so: Gerard de Narbon.

—Act I, scene i, lines 28-29

He was, in other words, of the city of Narbonne, and this, at least, fits well geographically. Narbonne is located some thirty miles north of Per-pignan.

… but Bertram's

Gerard de Narbon has left behind a beautiful and virtuous daughter, who is in the Countess' care. When all leave the stage, she remains and says:

… my imagination Carries no favor in't
but Bertram's. I am undone; there is
no living, none, If Bertram be away…

—Act I, scene i, lines 88-91

This is the major complication of the play. Helena, the doctor's daughter, loves Bertram, the young Count of Rousillon, and therefore loves "above her station." The doctor, however skilled, is of menial position, while Bertram is, of course, a nobleman.

… a notorious liar

Helena's soliloquy is interrupted by the entrance of Parolles, Bertram's favorite companion. Parolles professes to be a fierce warrior, dresses and talks the part, but does not fool Helena. She says, aside:

I love him [Parolles] for his [Bertram's] sake,
And yet I know him a notorious liar,
Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;

—Act I, scene i, lines 105-7

As a matter of fact, everyone who meets Parolles sees through him at once and knows him to be all talk (his very name is related to the French word for "words"). Only Bertram is deceived and takes him for genuine, which seems to be clear evidence that Bertram is rather a fool.

Under Mars …

Helena and Parolles engage in conversation and when Helena refers to the star under which he was born, he replies, swaggeringly:

Under Mars, ay.

—Act I, scene i, line 199

He claims in this way to have an inborn martial personality (see page I-404). Helena says, dryly, however:

When he [Mars] wax retrograde…

—Act I, scene i, line 203

Mars' path across the sky is generally from west to east against the background of the stars. Periodically, however, it changes direction and moves from east to west. It is then moving backward or "retrograde." The ancient Greeks labored to account for such retrograde motion but it wasn't till Copernicus elaborated the heliocentric view with the sun at the center of the solar system that the situation was made clear. Periodically, the earth in *its* orbit overtakes Mars and it is then that the planet seems to move backward.

Helena, by use of the term, indicates that if Parolles is born under Mars, he nevertheless moves backward and retreats hastily in battle.

The Florentines and Senoys. ..

The second scene opens in the King's palace in Paris. The King is involved in statecraft, saying:

The Florentines and Senoys are by th'ears,
Have fought with equal fortune, and continue
A braving war.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 1-3

Florence was the great city of the Italian Renaissance (see page I-448) and the "Senoys" are natives of Siena, a city about thirty miles

south of Florence. For centuries Siena and Florence were rivals, and down nearly to Boccaccio's time, the fight remained fairly equal.

Siena, however, was already declining when the *Decameron* was written and it came more and more under the Florentine shadow. In 1557 Florence finally gained political control of Siena and the latter's history as an independent city-state came to an end.

> … our cousin Austria

The King goes on to say:

> We here receive it
> A certainty, vouched from our cousin Austria,
> With caution, that the Florentine will move us
> For speedy aid; wherein our dearest friend
> Prejudicates the business, and would seem
> To have us make denial.

—Act II, scene i, lines 4-9

Again there is no use in searching history for any specific event that would mirror this.

In the sixteenth century there was a great rivalry between Francis I of France and the Emperor Charles V (see page II-747), the core of whose dominions within the Empire was Austria. Francis and Charles fought over Italy all through their reigns, with Charles having the better of it most of the time.

With this in mind, we can perhaps interpret the King's speech in terms of practical politics as follows. Austria has warned France that if she interferes in Italy and supports Florence, Austria will come to the aid of Siena in order to preserve the balance of power. France then adopts the prudent path of neutrality.

> The Tuscan service. ..

Yet if France cannot openly intervene, there is another method open to her. She can send "volunteers" (a device known to and used by nations in our own times). The King says:

> Yet, for our gentlemen that mean to see
> The Tuscan service, freely have they leave

To stand on either part.

—Act II, scene i, lines 12-14

The region in which Florence and Siena are located was known as Etruria in ancient tunes, and was inhabited by the Etruscans. The regional name was distorted to Tuscany (Toscana in Italian) in the Middle Ages.

Through the Middle Ages Tuscany did not form a separate and united political entity but was broken up among several city-states, of which Florence, Pisa, and Siena were the most important. In 1557, however, with the absorption of Siena, Florence came to be in control of the entire region. Cosimo I, Duke of Florence, was awarded the higher title of Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1569 by Pope Pius V. In Shakespeare's time, then, Tuscany was on the map.

… King Pippen…

And while the court is involved with the Tuscan wars, Helena arrives.

She hopes to cure the King with some of her dead father's remedies and she also hopes to see Bertram. She carries with her the best wishes of the old Countess, who loves the girl and doesn't seem to be disturbed by the thought of a *mesalliance.*

Lafew is at court to introduce Helena. He asks the King if he wants to be cured, but the King has so often been disappointed that he has given up and answers, crossly, in the negative. Lafew says:

O, will you eat No grapes, my royal fox?

—Act II, scene i, lines 71-72

The reference is, of course, to Aesop's famous fable of the fox who could not reach the grapes and who consoled himself with the thought that he did not want them anyway, since they were probably sour.

Lafew assures the King that he can indeed get the grapes and that there is indeed a cure. He describes the cure as something

… whose simple touch
Is powerful to araise King Pippen, nay,

To give great Charlemain a pen in's hand,
And write to her a love-line.

—Act II, scene i, lines 77-80

It can raise, in Lafew's hyperbole, the long dead Charlemagne, and his father Pepin (Pippen) the Short (see page II-455).

Lafew then brings in Helena and leaves her with the King, saying as he himself departs:

1 am Cressid's uncle,
That dare leave two together.

—Act II, scene i, lines 99-100

Cressid's uncle was Pandarus, who served as go-between for her and Troilus (see page I-79) and was thus the original pander. Lafew's "pandering" is, of course, of quite another kind.

Moist Hesperus…

Helena promises the King a quick recovery. In fact, he will be well

Ere twice in murk and occidental damp
Moist Hesperus hath quenched her sleepy lamp,

—Act II, scene i, lines 165-66

Hesperus (see page I-187) is the evening star. It sets in the western ocean (hence "occidental damp" and "moist") and it sets up to three hours after the sun, so that her light is a "sleepy lamp."

… Galen and Paracelsus

The medicine works precisely as Helena had promised and the King is quickly made well. All, even Lafew, are astonished, since all the other physicians had been utterly helpless. Even the worthless

Parolles agrees, saying:

> So 1 say-both of Galen and Paracelsus.

—Act II, scene iii, line 11

Galen was a Greek physician who settled in Rome in 164. He wrote many books on medicine, which were excellent for their time. They survived the fall of ancient civilization and were considered the last word on the subject throughout the Middle Ages.

The first physician to argue strenuously against blind acceptance of Galen and in favor of a new regime of mineral medicines as opposed to the old use of herbs was Theophrastus von Hohenheim, better known by his self-adopted nickname of Paracelsus. He lived from 1493 to 1541 and from Shakespeare's point of view would have been a "modern" physician.

What Parolles is saying, then, is that the King had been given up by all physicians of both the old school and the new.

> … Saint Jaques' pilgrim …

The King is naturally grateful to Helena and offers her, as a reward, marriage with any of the noblemen at court. She chooses Bertram, who starts back in revulsion and horror at the thought of marrying a lowborn girl.

The King insists, however, and Bertram is forced into marriage. As soon as that is done, however, the young man determines to make it a dead letter. He orders Helena back to Rousillon without taking her to bed or even kissing her.

She goes submissively, and when she arrives, she has only a letter to show Bertram's mother, the Countess. He says he is off to the Tuscan wars and will never return as long as he is burdened with a wife he cannot accept. Nor will he ever accept her until she can produce his ring, which he will not give her, and show him a child begotten by him, for which he will give her no opportunity.

The old Countess is horrified. She is all on Helena's side, as is everyone else in the play (and in the audience) except for Parolles and, of course, Bertram himself.

But Helena begins to put into action a plan of her own. She departs from Rousillon in secret, leaving behind a letter that starts:

> I am Saint Jaques' pilgrim, thither gone.

—Act III, scene iv, line 4

St. Jaques is James the Apostle, the son of Zebedee. According to a tradition which has no biblical backing whatever, he visited Spain and preached the gospel there. As a result, he is accepted now as the patron saint of Spain. He must, however, have returned to Judea, for the Bible records his death there at the order of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2).

Tradition then takes over again and has his dead body miraculously whisked to Spain, where it finally came to rest in a shrine at Compostela, a city in the northwestern corner of Spain, about six hundred miles west of Perpignan. If Helena goes there she is traveling in the direction opposite to that Bertram has taken. She is going west into farthest Spain, he east to Tuscany.

"James" is the English version of a Hebrew name of which "Jacob" is the Old Testament version. In Spanish it is Iago, and St. James is Santiago. The city in which the bones were thought to rest is Santiago de Compostela.

… his despiteful Juno …

Helena asks the Countess to write and tell Bertram she is gone so that he can come safely home from the wars. She scolds herself, saying:

> His taken [undertaken] labors bid him [Bertram] me forgive;
> I, his despiteful Juno, sent him forth
> From courtly friends with camping foes to live,

—Act III, scene iv, lines 12-14

Hercules, who was Jupiter's son by a mortal woman, naturally incurred the wrath of Juno (Hera), who was Jupiter's lawful wife. It was her enmity that visited him with periodic bouts of madness and condemned him to perform twelve labors for an unworthy cousin. Analogously, Helena considers the mere fact of her own existence to be condemning Bertram to warlike labors.

… the palmers …

As a matter of fact, though, Helena is not quite as unselfish as she is presenting herself to be. She does not go to the shrine at all but sneaks off to Florence in disguise as a pilgrim, hoping that she may yet win her reluctant husband. There she stops to ask:

Where do the palmers lodge, I do beseech you?

—Act III, scene v, line 35

A pilgrim who had visited the Holy Land was privileged to wear palm leaves as a token he had done so (it is a plant native to Palestine) and was therefore called a "palmer."

Helena asks the question of an old Widow, who offers her lodgings. The Widow has a beautiful and virtuous daughter, Diana, and it quickly turns out that Bertram (who is doing very well in Florence and is now a cavalry officer) is busily engaged in trying to seduce the girl.

Helena reveals her identity and persuades the two women to let her take Diana's place so that Bertram will sleep with her unknowingly, thinking she is Diana.

Diana agrees and cajoles Bertram into giving her his ring (the one he wrote in his letter that Helena would have to display before he would accept her as wife) and offers him an assignation provided he promises to stay only an hour and to refrain from speaking to her during that time. She promises to give him another ring in exchange for his after he has slept with her. So eager is he to win her that he agrees.

Helena then arranges to have herself reported as having reached Santiago de Compostela and to have died there.

… he parallels Nessus

Parolles, meanwhile, has won the contempt of all the officers, and they scheme to maneuver him into betraying his real character. Parolles has been sent out on a dangerous mission for which, out of sheer stupid braggadocio, he has volunteered. He is captured by his own colleagues and is blindfolded.

Pretending to be foreigners of strange speech, they question him through a mock interpreter. At the merest hint of torture, he tells everything he knows and reviles the very men who (unknown to him) are holding him prisoner. He even defames Bertram.

Thus, of one officer, he says:

… for rapes and ravishments he parallels Nessus.

—Act IV, scene iii, line 264

Nessus was the centaur who tried to rape Hercules' wife, Deianeira (see page I-380).

When he has completely unmasked himself for the coward he is, his blindfold is removed and he realizes that he is ruined. He decides to make the best of it, however, and later, in fact, he enters the service of the kindly Lafew and does well enough.

… at Marseilles. ..

With Helena's reported death, Bertram can return to Rousillon, but first he wants to go through with the seduction of Diana. This takes place offstage, but we gather that Helena has safely substituted herself. Bertram has kept the bargain, stayed an hour, refrained from speaking, and accepted the ring (Helena's ring, which she, in turn, had received from the King of France). And Helena has the ring Bertram gave Diana.

Helena is therefore also ready to return, taking the Widow and Diana with her. She intends to see the King and says to her companions:

/ duly am informed
His Grace is at Marseilles, to which place
We have convenient convoy.

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 8-10

Marseilles is the great French port on the Mediterranean, about 280 miles west of Florence and 140 miles northeast of Roussillon. If Helena goes to Marseilles, she is two thirds of the way home.

She is counting on the King's continuing gratitude, for she says her services were such that

… gratitude
Through flinty Tartar's bosom would peep forth,
And answer thanks

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 6-8

In the thirteenth century Mongol tribes from central Asia swept westward and penetrated deep into Europe, reaching almost to the Adriatic in 1240. This gave Europe a scare from which it didn't recover for a long time.

The Mongols called themselves Tatars, but to the Europeans this became Tartars (from Tartarus, see page I-40). The Tatars, considered as creatures from hell, were naturally considered the epitome of heartlessness, and Helena felt that even they would feel gratitude for services such as hers.

All's well that ends well. ..

Helena has gone through a great deal and there is more yet to go through, but she keeps up her spirits with a stouthearted:

All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown.

—Act IV, scene iv, line 35

The word "fine," from the French *fin,* means "end" here. Helena is saying that the nature of the end crowns the work, making it success or failure. This so summarizes the play-which, from Helena's point of view, is nothing but misery all the way to very nearly the end-that it has become the title of the play.

Yet is it possible the play once had a different title?

An English clergyman, Francis Meres, wrote a book in 1598 in which he compared contemporary English authors with classical and Italian ones, and, in the process, he listed Shakespeare's plays. He included one named *Love's Labor's Won.* This is the only play ever attributed to Shakespeare that we have no record of under the title mentioned. Either it's a lost play or we have it under a different title.

If the latter, it must be one that isn't mentioned by Meres under its own title and one that had already been written by 1598. One possibility is *The Taming of the Shrew,* in which Petruchio must labor hard indeed to establish love between himself and Katherina (see page I-462). There is, however, a reference in a 1603 account book to both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Love's Labor's Won.*

The most popular theory, therefore, is that it refers to *All's Well That Ends Well* and to Helena's hard labor to win Bertram. But, alas, that means that the play would have had to be written several years

before it was.

It's a problem that may never be solved completely, but I would like to suggest a possibility I have not seen advanced. Shakespeare may perhaps have written *Love's Labor's Won* in, say, 1597, and because it was a failure, rewrote it extensively and produced it as *All's Well That Ends Well,* with no record of the earlier version except for the casual mention of Meres, writing between the two.

… no great Nebuchadnezzar …

There is an interval before the resolution in the last act in which the Countess has the last of several confrontations with a Clown. None of these serves to advance the plot, but each is intended as comic relief. In this last, the Clown mentions "grace" and promptly expands it into wordplay by saying to Lafew:

/ am no great Nebuchadnezzar, sir;
1 have not much skill in grace.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 21-22

This equates "grace" and "grass," and Nebuchadnezzar is brought in because according to the biblical account (Daniel 4:28-37) he was punished for his arrogance by being stricken with a madness that drove him out into the fields and caused him to eat grass for seven years.

The Black Prince…

The Clown also refers to the devil as having an English name, for he is

The Black Prince, sir,
alias the prince of darkness, alias the devil.

—Act IV, scene v, lines 43-44

It is quite appropriate to speak of the devil as the "prince of darkness," for our modern conception of the devil comes, in part, from the Persian notion of a dualistic cosmic order in which the forces of

light and good under Ahura Mazda fight a continuing giant battle against the forces of darkness and evil under Ahriman.

And a prince of darkness would naturally be a Black Prince like the famous eldest son of Edward III (see page II-260).

> Plutus himself …

Bertram has now come back to Rousillon. When Helena reaches Marseilles, she finds that the King has gone to Rousillon and she follows. All are now converging on Rousillon for the climax.

Bertram is generally blamed by all for his treatment of Helena, but since Helena is dead, the slate is washed clean and preparations are made for a second marriage, to none other than Lafew's daughter.

A token must be given to the new bride and Bertram hands over the ring which he had (as he thought) obtained from Diana. It is really Helena's ring, however, which she obtained from the King; and the King recognizes it. Despite Bertram's denial, the King is firm in that recognition, saying:

> Plutus himself
> That knows the tinct and multiplying med'cine,
> Hath not in nature's mystery more science [knowledge]
> Than I have in this ring. 'Twas mine, 'twas Helen's,

—Act V, scene iii, lines 101-4

Plutus was the god of wealth, and was equated with gold in particular. It was believed in medieval times that there was some substance which could be used to turn less valuable metals into gold and this was called "the philosopher's stone." This same substance could also cure any disease and was "the elixir of life." Though medieval alchemists never found this substance, they were sure it existed in the earth, else how was the gold in its bowels formed?

Plutus, therefore, can be spoken of as knowing the medicine (a reference to the elixir of life) that produces gold, so that it was a "multiplying med'cine" because it multiplies the earth's store of gold.

> … ever, ever dearly

The King begins to suspect that Bertram got the ring by foul play, that Helena was murdered. Bertram is arrested and suddenly Diana

enters, claiming Bertram as her husband.

Desperately, Bertram tries to blacken Diana as a camp follower of the army in Tuscany, and the growing confusion is only straightened out when Helena appears, alive after all.

She shows Bertram's ring, and refers to the fact that she is now pregnant with Bertram's child. She has fulfilled Bertram's conditions and he must now accept her as his wife. Bertram cries out to the King:

> If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly,
> I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly.

—Act V, scene Hi, lines 315-16

Those are his last words in the play, and all's well that ends well.

23. The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice

Of the plays included in this section, *Othello* is the only one to represent a major Shakespearean tragedy which will bear comparison to such plays as *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *King Lear.* It seems to have been written in 1603, after *Hamlet* and before the other two.

Othello is remarkable in that its hero is a "Moor." To Shakespeare a Moor was not clearly distinguished from a black and, given the parochial feeling of Europeans of the time (and, to a large extent, since) concerning men who differed in religion (Moors) or skin color (blacks), these would serve as natural villains, with their mere difference sufficient to account for their villainy. In *Titus Andronicus* Aaron the Moor (see page I-401) is a villain of this sort, and in *The Merchant of Venice* the Prince of Morocco (see page I-520), while a valiant soldier, is scorned by Portia, who derides the color of his skin.

In *Othello,* however, the Moor is pictured in another fashion, as an exotic figure who exerts a powerful sexual attraction over a white girl, partly because of the wide difference between him and the men she is accustomed to. This is not so uncommon a thing. In the early 1920s Rudolph Valentine played the title role in the motion picture *The Sheik* and caused millions of women to swoon in ecstasy, despite (or possibly because of) the fact that he was a "Moor" and must be a Mohammedan.

The Moor, as an exotic and therefore romantic figure, was used by an Italian writer of tales, Giovanni Battista Giraldi, who wrote under the name of Cynthius. A hundred of his stories were collected into a book called *Gli Hecatommithi (The Hundred Tales)* and published in 1565. One of these stories begins: "There once lived in Venice a Moor, who was very valiant and of a handsome person…" No reason is given for a Moor living in Venice; no discussion as to his religion is brought out. What was needed for the story, apparently, was someone at once romantic and of a passionate southern nature.

This story was taken by Shakespeare, who kept close to many of the details of the plot.

… a Florentine

The play opens in the city of Venice (see page I-499) late at night. Two Venetians are having an earnest discussion over some point that is not immediately apparent. One of them, Roderigo, is rather petulant over what he feels to be a double cross on the part of the other, Iago.

Iago insists that he is not double-crossing, that he does indeed hate a person who is not yet identified. He gives his reasons. Influential men, it seems, have asked the unnamed to make Iago his lieutenant and have been refused. Another has been chosen for the post and he is

> Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
> One Michael Cassia, a Florentine,
> (A fellow almost damned in a fair wife)
> That never set a squadron in the field,

—Act I, scene i, lines 16-19

Iago is almost sick with anger at having been passed over for such a one. Cassio is an "arithmetician," that is, one who studied the art of war out of books, instead of in actual battle. And he is a Florentine rather than a Venetian, and Florence, in Shakespeare's time, was renowned for trade, rather than war.

The reference here to Cassio's "fair wife" is a puzzling one. This wife does not appear in the play nor is she ever referred to again. In the Cynthius original, the character who is equivalent to Cassio does have a wife and perhaps Shakespeare intended to use her at first. If he did, he abandoned the idea and did not bother to correct the line.

> At Rhodes, at Cyprus. ..

Iago goes on, with gathering anger:

> And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
> At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds
> Christian and heathen, must be belee'd and calmed

—Act I, scene i, lines 25-27

When Venice gained territories in the eastern Mediterranean (see page I-592) she took on burdens as well, and the greatest of these was the task of opposing the Ottoman Turks, who became dominant in the Balkan peninsula and the eastern Mediterranean in the course of the fourteenth century.

Rhodes, an island off the southeast shores of Asia, Minor, was

under the rule of Italian adventurers after the Crusaders' conquest of parts of the East. It remained under Western control for nearly three centuries while Turkish power spread over Asia Minor and into the Balkans.

In 1480 the Turkish sultan, Mohammed II, laid siege to Rhodes and was beaten off. In 1522 the later sultan, Suleiman I the Magnificent (see page I-520), finally took it.

Cyprus is a larger island, near the eastern end of the Mediterranean. It too was captured by Crusaders, but in 1489 it came under the control of Venice. Venice's expansion over some of the shores and islands of the eastern Mediterranean involved her in wars with the Turks, and over the space of two and a half centuries there were to be five of these.

The fourth of these wars was fought from 1570 to 1573. This was after Cynthius had written the tale Shakespeare used as model. It took place in Shakespeare's boyhood, however, and it may possibly have been in his mind as he wrote.

> … his Moorship's ancient Still referring to Cassio, Iago says, bitterly:
> He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
> And I-God bless the mark!-his Moorship's ancient.

—Act I, scene i, lines 29-30

Clearly now we are talking about Othello, the Moor of Venice, and Iago's scorn is seen in the twisting of "Worship" into "Moorship." An "ancient" is what we now call an "ensign" (see page II-398), a lesser position than that of lieutenant even in our own navy. We can be sure Iago is not the man to take this lying down.

> … the thick-lips…

Roderigo comments discontentedly upon how everything seems to be going well for the Moor:

> What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe [possess] //
> he can carry't thus!

—Act I, scene i, lines 63-64

As we are soon to find out, what is bothering Roderigo is that the Moor is doing very well in his courtship of Desdemona, the lovely daughter of Brabantio, one of Venice's most powerful and wealthy senators. Roderigo would like to have Desdemona for himself.

The use of the term "thick-lips" is the first indication that Shakespeare is talking about a true black, rather than merely a Moor of north Africa, who, despite a swarthy complexion, would not be a black. (In Cynthius' story, on the other hand, there is no indication whatsoever that the Moor was a black.)

There are other such references. Thus, Iago's first impulse of revenge is to warn Brabantio in the coarsest possible way, so as to ensure he will take frantic action against the Moor. Before Brabantio's house they call and yell till the senator comes to the window. Then Iago shouts out his warning:

> Zounds, sir, y'are robbed! For shame.
> Put on your gown! Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul
> Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
> Is tupping your white ewe.

—Act I, scene i, lines 83-86

It is to Othello, of course, that Iago refers with the phrase "old black ram."

> … a Barbary horse. ..

When Brabantio proves hard to persuade that his daughter has eloped with Othello, Iago, impatient of his incredulity, says:

> Because we come to do you service
> and you think we are ruffians, you'll have
> your daughter covered with a Barbary horse …

—Act I, scene i, lines 106-9

To the ancient Greeks, all who did not speak Greek were "barbarians," and when Rome came to dominate the Mediterranean

that was modified to include those who did not speak Greek or Latin. Since the most prominent barbarians in the last centuries of the Roman Empire were the German-speaking tribesmen to the north, the word came to take on a derogatory tinge and to mean "uncivilized" and "brutal" as well as merely "foreign."

The Italians of the Renaissance period, having rediscovered the Greco-Roman pagan past, picked up the habit. To them, the Europeans north of the Alps and the Africans south of the Mediterranean were barbarians. All Europe could agree with respect to the Africans anyway, and north Africa came to be called "Barbary." The people of north Africa are still called Berbers today, and that is but another form of the word.

Iago, in referring to Othello as a "Barbary horse," is now using Moor in its more correct sense, with reference to northern Africa rather than black Africa.

… to the Sagittary …

Brabantio is finally persuaded to search through the house to see if his daughter is at home, and while he is doing so, Iago takes his leave so as not to be identified. Roderigo is to carry on himself and Iago leaves him instructions as to how to guide the search. He says:

> Lead to the Sagittary the raised search;
> And there will I be with him.

—Act I, scene i, lines 155-56

"Sagittary" might be the name of the inn at which Othello is lodging, but there is no clear indication of it. "Sagittary" is the equivalent of the Latin *Sagittarius* ("archer") and it is just possible that the name is that of an arsenal where weapons of war are stored. Venice did indeed have a famous one, and Othello, who is pictured in the play as Venice's most capable general, might well be engaged in inspection and stocktaking, even during his honeymoon.

… the Signiory

Brabantio, unable to find his daughter, rouses his family and friends to take revenge on Othello.

Meanwhile, Iago has reached Othello again and (with an

appearance of bluff honesty) warns him of Brabantio's hostility. Othello, who has indeed eloped with and married Desdemona, shrugs it off, saying:

> Let him do his spite.
> My services which I have done the Signiory
> Shall out-tongue his complaints.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 16-18

The Signiory is the ruling body of Venice. It comes from the same Latin root as "senior" or "senator," so that the name signifies it is a body of elders who put their experience and wisdom to the task of ruling the state.

The government of Venice was, in many ways, the admiration of Europe.

Although originally fairly democratic, it became a closed oligarchy about 1200. From then on for six hundred years a few great families ran the state according to a rigid ideal of duty. (Of course they took, as their reward, the lion's share of the city's wealth for themselves.) In all this time there was but one dangerous revolt against the oligarchy-in 1310-and that was firmly crushed.

Other states might have their extravagant royal families, their court intrigue, civil wars, broils, disruptions; Venice went on in the even tenor of its ways, trading, fighting, prospering, and making all its decisions in the cold light of self-interest.

It is not surprising, then, that Shakespeare in this play portrays the government of Venice to be unemotional and coldly rational at all times.

> By Janus…

Othello calmly awaits the coming of Brabantio and his party. When a group of men enter with torches, it seems at first this must be they, but Iago, peering toward them, says:

> By Janus, I think no.

—Act I, scene ii, line 32

Since Janus is commonly represented with two heads (see page I-502) and since the entire play is a demonstration of the two-facedness of Iago, it is entirely proper that he swear by Janus.

The Duke…

The party that has entered turns out to be under the leadership of Cassio, Othello's new lieutenant. Cassio says to Othello:

> The Duke does greet you, general;
> And he requires your haste-post haste appearance
> Even on the instant.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 35-37

The north Italian word for "duke" is "doge," and this form of the word is associated primarily with Venice (though Genoa also had its doges).

The first Doge of Venice assumed the position possibly as early as 697. The last Doge stepped down in 1797, when Napoleon cavalierly put an end to the Venetian republic. There had been a continuous line of doges for eleven centuries, a most amazing record.

The most unusual doge on the whole list is Enrico Dandolo, who assumed the position in 1192 at the age of eighty-four. Not only was he old, but he was blind as well, yet in 1203 (when he was ninety-five!) he was the indomitable leader of the Crusaders' expedition against Constantinople and carried that expedition through to victory.

In later centuries, though, the Doge was pretty much a figurehead and it was the impersonal oligarchy, the Signiory, that ran the republic.

… the sooty bosom

Before Othello can answer the summons, Brabantio and his party arrive. Angrily, Brabantio accuses Othello of having used enchantment, as otherwise his daughter couldn't possibly have

> Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
> Of such a thing as thou-to fear, not to delight.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 69-70

Again a reference to Othello as a black. Othello, noble, powerful, accomplished, high in all men's regard, would be a good match for the girl but for his skin color. Yet it is interesting that Brabantio makes no mention of religion. Nor is the matter of religion mentioned anywhere in the play.

And yet if we take *Othello* seriously and don't dismiss it as simply a romance in which we need not peer too closely at the details, we must suppose that Othello was born a Mohammedan. It is inconceivable that the Venetians would trust a Mohammedan to lead their armed forces against the Mohammedan Turks; we must therefore further assume that Othello was a converted Christian.

> … the general enemy Ottoman

For a while it seems that fighting will break out, but Othello preserves a magnificent calm and, in any case, Brabantio too has been summoned to the Signiory.

In the council chamber, the Signiory is gravely considering the news that a Turkish fleet is at sea, with its destination uncertain. Calmly, they weigh what evidence they have and decide the Turks are aiming for Cyprus.

When Othello enters, the Duke says:

> Valiant Othello, we must straight [immediately] employ you
> Against the general enemy Ottoman.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 48-49

There have been numerous tribes of Turks who have made their mark in history, and those against whom the Crusaders fought in the twelfth century were the Seljuk Turks.

Two centuries later a group of Turks under Osman I (or Othman, in Arabic) began to win successes. The particular Turks under this ruler and under his successors were called Osmanli Turks or, more commonly, though incorrectly, Ottoman Turks. It was under the Ottoman rule that Turkish power reached its heights.

Under Orkhan I, the son of Osman I, all of Asia Minor was taken, and in 1345 Orkhan took advantage of a civil war among the Byzantines to cross over the Dardanelles. Thus the Turk entered Europe, never to leave.

In 1453 the Ottoman Turks took Constantinople and by Shakespeare's time they ruled a vast empire covering western Asia, northern Africa, and southeastern Europe. It had passed its peak at the time *Othello* was written but so slightly that the decline was not yet visible, and it still seemed (and was) the most powerful state in Europe.

The Anthropophagi …

It is only after speaking to Othello that the Duke notices Brabantio, who instantly pours forth his tale of anger and woe, accusing the Moor once again of having used enchantment.

Othello offers to send for Desdemona so that she might bear witness herself and meanwhile gives his own account. He has often been a guest at Brabantio's house, he says, and at his host's request would tell of his adventurous life and the strange things he has seen:

.. .of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Grew beneath their shoulders.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 142-44

"Anthropophagi" is Greek for "man-eaters." The word "cannibal" came into use only after Columbus' voyage, when man-eating habits were discovered among a group of Indians inhabiting the smaller islands of what are now called the West Indies. One of the names given them was "Caniba," and from that came "cannibal."

Actually, Shakespeare is taking a little bit out of Pliny here.

Gaius Plinius Secundus (the full name of the writer commonly called Pliny the Elder) was a Roman scholar who lived in the first century a.d. He was a prolific writer who tried to prepare a one-man encyclopedia of human knowledge culled from all the writers he could get hold of. In a.d 77 he published a thirty-seven-volume book called *Natural History* which digested two thousand ancient books and which was translated into English in 1601 (just two years before *Othello* was written) by Philemon Holland.

Pliny accepted rumors and travelers' tales and much of what he included was a farrago of legend and distortion, but all was so wondrous and interesting that the volumes survived the vicissitudes that followed the fall of the ancient world when other, more serious volumes did not.

Othello explains how Desdemona listened to his tales and came first to admire him and then to love him. Desdemona arrives and bears out Othello's tale, and Brabantio must give in. But in doing so, he sardonically warns that since Desdemona has proven capable of deceiving her father, she might deceive her husband as well.

> H'as done my office

All leave but Roderigo and Iago. Roderigo is in despair, for Othello seems to have won utterly. Iago, on the other hand, is not concerned. He has contempt for women and it seems to him that Desdemona cannot long remain in love with an old Moor. All Roderigo has to do is go to Cyprus with plenty of money (which, of course, Iago intends to charm into his own pockets) and wait his chance.

Then when Roderigo leaves too, Iago ruminates on the Moor and on his own plans for revenge, saying:

> / hate the Moor
> And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
> H'as done my office. I know not if't be true,
> But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
> Will do, as if for surety.

—Act I, scene iii, lines 377-81

This must be nonsense. From all we can guess about Othello from the picture Shakespeare paints, he is not this sort of man. But Iago, intent on revenge, is busy working up his sense of grievance and will seize upon anything to do so. The revenge must involve Cassio as well. He says:

> Cassia's a proper [handsome] man.
> Let me see now: To get his place…

—Act I, scene iii, lines 383-84

And he gets his idea.

> … Our wars are done

The scene shifts to Cyprus, where Montano, the Venetian governor, is awaiting events. There has been a great storm, which two Gentlemen on watch have witnessed. That tempest has, however, also served to abort the Turkish menace. A Third Gentlemen enters and says:

> News, lads! Our wars are done.
> The desperate tempest hath so banged the Turks
> That their designment [intention] halts.

—Act II, scene i, lines 20-22

There is no further mention of military matters and Othello has no chance to display his quality as a general. That is too bad, for thirty years before the play was written there had been a Venetian-Turkish war that would have offered a good model for a battle.

In 1570, when Shakespeare was six years old, Turkish forces had indeed invaded Cyprus, as in *Othello* they had merely threatened to do.

Venice, which controlled the island at the time, felt she could not face Turkey alone. She appealed for help to the Pope, who in turn appealed to the most dedicated of all the Catholic monarchs in Europe, Philip II of Spam.

While the Christian forces of Europe were slowly gathering for the counterattack, the Turks were advancing in Cyprus and were steadily beating back the Venetians. Nicosia, in the center of the island (and the capital of modern Cyprus), was taken on September 9, 1570, while Famagusta on the eastern shore was under siege. Turkish vessels penetrated the Adriatic.

It wasn't till the summer of 1571 that the Christian fleet was ready to sail and challenge the Turks. The fleet was put under the command of Don John of Austria, an illegitimate half brother of Philip II.

Famagusta had fallen, meanwhile, and in October 1571 the Turkish fleet was concentrated near a city on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth, a city which to Italian traders was known as Lepanto. It was six hundred miles northwest of Cyprus and seven hundred miles southeast of Venice itself.

On October 7, 1571, the allied fleet reached Lepanto and attacked the Turks in the last great battle to be fought with galleys, that is, by large ships driven by banks of oars. There were nearly 500 ships on both sides carrying over 60,000 soldiers in addition to the oarsmen. The Venetian ships distinguished themselves in the fighting that

followed, and, in the end, it was a great Christian victory. About 50 Turkish galleys were destroyed and 117 captured. Thousands of Christian slaves were liberated, and the news that the invincible Turks had been catastrophically defeated electrified Europe.

And yet Shakespeare did not make use of such an event. He might have allowed Othello to defeat the Turks offstage and gain a Lepanto-like victory as easily as he allowed the storm to do the job.

But then Lepanto must surely have seemed less glorious in England than elsewhere. It was a victory for Philip II of Spain, who was England's great enemy in Shakespeare's time. In 1588, only seventeen years after Lepanto, he had launched a huge Armada against England. The English defeated it and what was left of the Spanish fleet was destroyed in a storm.

It was the storm that defeated Philip II, rather than the earlier battle that gave him victory, that may have been in Shakespeare's mind.

> King Stephen…

One by one the Venetians arrive at Cyprus, having weathered the storm. First Cassio, then Desdemona, Iago, and Roderigo, and finally Othello. Othello, completely happy to be with his Desdemona, to have Cyprus safe, and the Turks gone, proclaims a holiday.

Now it is up to Iago to use that holiday as an excuse to get Cassio drunk -the first step in his plan.

Iago sets up a drinking party. Cassio protests he has a weak head for liquor but Iago will not listen. In no tune there is drinking, comic songs, and foolish prattle. At one point, Iago sings a song that begins:

> King Stephen was and a worthy peer;
> His breeches cost him but a crown;

—Act II, scene iii, lines 86-87

It is a nonsense song, brought to Iago's mind by talk of England, and England did indeed have a King Stephen.

In 1135 King Henry I died, leaving as an heir a single daughter named Matilda. The nobility did not approve of a woman ruler, however, and turned to the old King's nephew, Stephen.

Stephen was crowned and kept his throne till his death in 1154. His reign, however, was a disastrous one. There was almost continuous civil war, first with Matilda and then with her son, Henry.

Scotland took advantage of England's troubles to extend her sway southward, and the English nobility grew turbulent and independent of the crown.

And yet Stephen was a genial, good-natured man who was popular with the people, especially the Londoners, and might well have inspired good-natured comic songs in his honor.

> … ay many mouths as Hydra…

And now the plot begins to work. Cassio, quickly drunk, staggers away. Iago had earlier arranged with Roderigo to have him pick a fight with Cassio, and meanwhile he tells Montano, with apparent reluctance and great concern, that Cassio is often drunk.

Roderigo comes running back, with Cassio in clamorous pursuit. Montano tries to restrain Cassio and in no time they are fighting and Montano is wounded. Iago sends Roderigo to set the alarm bell ringing and soon Othello, roused from bed, is on the scene.

Othello wants to know what happened and Iago tells him accurately, omitting only the fact that he himself had arranged everything. Othello has no choice but to discharge Cassio.

Yet Iago's game is not over; it is merely beginning. Cassio's discharge is well and good and now Iago may become lieutenant in his place. By now, though, Iago is after bigger game and cannot be stopped.

Critics have often maintained that Iago lacks real motive for his villainy and continues out of "motiveless malignity." It seems to me, however, that this simply isn't so. To many people there is a fierce delight in pulling strings, in the feeling of power that comes out of making others into marionettes whom one can manipulate at will.

The excellent results of Iago's maneuvering, so far, had whetted his appetite for more of the same, and we might suppose that by this time Iago could even forget his own wrongs in the sheer delight of watching himself twitch those about him into annihilation.

Thus, he twitches another string and encourages Cassio to hope for rehabilitation. But poor Cassio is too abashed to approach Othello. He says:

> / will ask him for my place again:
> he shall tell me 1 am a drunkard.
> Had I as many mouths as Hydra, such an answer would stop them all.

—Act II, scene iii, lines 302-4

The Hydra is the many-headed monster whom Hercules slew in the second of his twelve labors (see page I-237).

Iago, however, has the cure for Cassio's pessimism and pulls another string. All Cassio need do is ask Desdemona to intercede with Othello, and he can reach Desdemona through her lady in waiting, Emilia, who happens to be Iago's wife. With the dawn of hope, Cassio agrees to try.

> … the green-eyed monster. ..

The plan begins well. Cassio sees Emilia and then Desdemona, and the latter agrees to intercede with Othello.

As Cassio leaves Desdemona, however, Iago and Othello arrive on the scene and Iago, looking after Cassio, mutters:

> Ha! I like not that.

—Act III, scene iii, line 34

He won't explain himself, but it is enough to insert the first uncertainty into Othello's mind concerning Desdemona and Cassio. Then, when Desdemona begins to plead for Cassio, that can but increase the uncertainty.

After Desdemona leaves, Iago, with infinite cleverness, manages to fire Othello into jealousy by the very manner in which he himself refuses to say anything. The very show of reluctance on Iago's part gives Othello the greater room for imagining the worse, and Iago warns him in terms that but feed his fear, saying:

> O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
> It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock
> The meat it feeds on.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 165-67

Because of these verses, the expression "green-eyed monster" has become a common metaphor signifying jealousy and its mundane meaning is lost. The "green-eyed monster" is obviously the cat, which

plays with the mouse it catches, releasing it only to catch it again, over and over. In the same way, jealousy torments the one who experiences it, for he cannot ever be made secure. Every proof to the contrary releases him only briefly, till some new incident rouses the jealousy again.

… her jesses…

Othello understands the torments of jealousy and he will not sit still to be a prey to it. He will have the matter put to the test, either to be proven or disproven. After Iago has left, he muses:

// I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind

—Act III, scene iii, lines 259-61

The language used here is that of falconry. In medieval times it was an aristocratic sport to train falcons, hawks, and other birds of prey to hunt game, and, like every other specialized activity, it developed its own vocabulary.

A haggard is an untamed hawk; one that is caught after it is adult so that any taming is superficial and so that there always remains a tendency to revert to the wild. Jesses are small leather straps around the hawk's leg which are usually supplied with a ring that can be attached to the glove on the hawker's hand. To whistle her off would be to let her go.

Actually, though, Othello is already convinced of Desdemona's infidelity. When she comes in to call him gaily to dinner, she sees something is wrong and asks if anything ails him. He answers, ominously:

/ have a pain upon my forehead, here.

—Act III, scene iii, line 283

He touches his forehead, and to the Elizabethan audience, any reference to the forehead means the horns that sprout there and signify cuckoldry.

The innocent Desdemona offers him her handkerchief to bind his head but he pushes it roughly away and it falls to the ground unnoticed by her.

The handkerchief is a very special one, a gift to Desdemona from Othello. Now it lies there and Emilia picks it up. Her husband, Iago, had often asked her to steal it for him (we are not told why) and now she can give it to him.

Iago is elated on receiving it. He sees how he can use it in his plan. When Othello enters, Iago muses with grim satisfaction on the perturbed appearance of the general. He says to himself, concerning Othello:

> Not poppy nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou owedst [possessed] yesterday.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 327-30

There has always been a use for the equivalent of tranquilizers, for there have always been tensions. Before the days of modern chemistry, tranquil-izing herbs were found in nature, and of these the chief was a certain species of poppy which was originally grown along the shores of the eastern Mediterranean for the sake of its edible seeds.

Undoubtedly, other parts of the plant were nibbled on and it must have been noticed that nibbling the fruit eased small pains and discomforts, reduced tension, and encouraged sleep. It was eventually discovered that one could express juice from the fruit and use that as a sedative. The Greek word *opion* is a diminutive form of the word for juice, and in Latin that becomes *opium.*

One wonders if the famous lotus-eaters in the *Odyssey,* who ate of the lotus and wished nothing more than to dream away their lives in tranquil content, were not really poppy-eaters.

There is a less exaggerated mention in the *Odyssey* of a tranquilizing drug. When Helen and Menelaus are hosts to Telemachus (the son of Ulysses) in Sparta, they serve wine to which Helen adds a drug "that banishes all care, sorrow, and ill humor." A little opium might do that too. In Greek, the name of the drug Helen uses is *nepenthes,* meaning "no sorrow."

As for mandragora, that is an older form of mandrake (see page I-336).

… the Pontic Sea

Othello's state of mind has brought Iago himself to danger, for in his present frenzy, he demands proof or he will have Iago's life. Without flinching, Iago makes up the necessary lie. He says he once shared a bed with Cassio, who talked in his sleep and revealed his affair with Desdemona. He then adds the climactic bit when he says that the handkerchief Othello gave Desdemona is now in the possession of Cassio.

That does it. Othello is reduced to such a pitch of mad fury that he cries for blood. Coolly, Iago urges Othello to be patient and his intentness on revenge may vanish. But Othello says:

> Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Nev'r keeps retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
> Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
> Shall nev'r look back, nev'r ebb to humble love,

—Act III, scene iii, lines 450-57

The "Pontic Sea" is the Black Sea, which is connected to the Mediterranean through narrow straits. At its southwest corner is the Bosporus, about twenty miles long and no more than half a mile wide at its narrowest. It runs just about north and south and at its southern end widens out into a small body of water which we call the Sea of Marmara. (The ancient Greeks called it the "Propontis," meaning "before the Pontus," since a Greek traveler leaving the Aegean Sea must travel through the Propontis before getting to the Pontus.)

The Propontis narrows to a second strait, the Dardanelles, or, to the Greeks, the Hellespont (see page I-466).

The Mediterranean Sea, into which the Hellespont opens, is a warm sea. The sun beats down upon it and sometimes the hot, dry winds blow northward out of the Sahara Desert. Much water is lost by evaporation and only a small part of it is replaced by river water. Only one major river flows into the Mediterranean and that is the Nile; and after its long trip through desert regions not as much water is delivered into the Mediterranean by the Nile as one might suppose from the length of the river. The other rivers that flow into the Mediterranean-the Ebro, Rhone, Po, Tiber -don't count for much, despite their historic associations.

The result is that if the Mediterranean were existing in isolation it would gradually dry and shrink to a smaller size than it is.

It is quite otherwise with the Black Sea, which is distinctly cooler than the Mediterranean and free of the Saharan winds. There is less evaporation, to begin with. This smaller amount of evaporation is more than made up for by the giant rivers that flow into it-the Danube, Dniester, Bug, Dnieper, and Don.

If the Black Sea existed in isolation, it would overflow.

The result is that the waters of the Black Sea pass constantly through the straits and pour ceaselessly into the Mediterranean without ever any ebb to this steady flow, and it is to this that Othello refers. (Water is also constantly pouring into the Mediterranean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar.)

> … my lieutenant

Othello intends death now, as soon as the case is proved. He orders Iago to arrange the assassination of Cassio. Iago now has everything he wants. Cassio has been amply paid back for daring to move over his head-to the death. Othello has been destroyed; the noble general he once was he can never be again.

There remains Desdemona. She has not offended Iago. He seems to have a momentary qualm about her. When Othello orders him to kill Cassio, Iago says:

> 'Tis done at your request.
> But let her live.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 471-72

Yet the immediate effect of this is to drive Othello further into his maddened rage, so that he cries out:

> Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her! Damn her!
> Come, go with me apart. I will withdraw
> To furnish me with some swift means of death
> For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant

—Act III, scene iii, lines 472-75

We might even imagine that Iago's soft request for mercy was designed to provoke this anger; that without any personal hatred for Desdemona at all, he nevertheless enjoyed pushing the buttons.

A sibyl.. .

Desdemona has by now realized she has lost her handkerchief and is very disturbed. Othello (testing whether she has given it to Cassio, as Iago said) asks for it, and the nervous Desdemona, forced to admit she doesn't have it on her person, is afraid to say she has lost it. Othello harshly warns her that the handkerchief is important; it has magic properties and is a love charm:

A sibyl that had numbered in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sewed the work;

—Act III, scene iv, lines 70-72

The aged sibyl is an image used often by Shakespeare (see page I-452), and we may well believe that Othello accepts the truth of sibyls as he does of Pliny's wonders.

Still Desdemona can't produce the handkerchief and still she fearfully denies it is lost. Othello stalks off in a rage.

… would prove a crocodile

Iago now sets about supplying the last touch. He has planted the handkerchief in Cassio's chambers. Cassio finds it, likes it, and gives it to his mistress, Bianca (a courtesan), to copy over so that he will have a similar handkerchief after he returns this one to its rightful owner, whoever that might be.

Iago then finds occasion to draw Cassio aside, with Othello watching from a place where he can see but not hear. Iago teases Cassio with the great love Bianca has for him. Cassio preens and smirks with the usual male self-satisfaction over such matters and Othello can only assume (in his fevered state) that he is laughing over his amour with Desdemona.

And then Bianca enters and throws the handkerchief back at Cassio, for she has decided it must belong to another one of his girlfriends. Of course, Othello recognizes it at once and the case is

proven for him. The handkerchief he gave to Desdemona, she gave to Cassio, who thinks so little of it he passes it on to a courtesan. Othello is ready to kill Desdemona.

But the outside world intervenes. A deputation of important Venetian officials has arrived under the leadership of one Ludovico. They bring a message recalling Othello to Venice now that the war danger is gone and appointing Cassio as his successor.

Othello greets them with the necessary ceremony but is so far gone in his jealous madness that he cannot put a good face on matters even for the sake of the Venetian deputation. When Desdemona innocently tries to speak in Cassio's favor to the Venetians, Othello strikes her.

The horrified Ludovico upbraids Othello and exclaims at the sight of the weeping Desdemona. But the raving Othello says:

> O devil, devil!
> If that the earth could teem with woman's tears,
> Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 244-46

In other words, if tears falling to earth could act as semen to make the earth pregnant and bring forth life, Desdemona's tears would cause it to bring forth crocodiles.

This refers to a well-known legend concerning crocodiles. (Othello is a veritable compendium of legends.) Crocodiles were supposed to moan and sigh, so that passers-by might think human beings in distress were somewhere nearby. If any were softhearted enough, or curious enough, to turn aside in search of them, the crocodile's jaws snapped shut, and it would then continue to weep even while eating.

The story is quite untrue, but the phrase "crocodile tears" has entered the language to represent any form of hypocritical grief. The implication is that Desdemona's modesty and virtue are tissues of hypocrisy. The irony, of course, is that the play is filled with crocodile tears; they are all Iago's and Othello doesn't see them.

> … into Mauritania.. .

When Othello stalks off, Ludovico wonders if he is sane, and Iago seizes the opportunity to encourage that thought of possible insanity without actually committing himself to it.

But by now Iago has almost more strings in his hand than he can properly handle. Thus, when Othello takes himself to Desdemona's chamber to give her a bitter tongue-lashing, Emilia openly wonders if Othello might not be the victim of malicious slander. Then too, Roderigo has been gulled and robbed by Iago to the point where he can take no more. He threatens to talk to Desdemona directly and request the return of his jewels.

We can be pretty sure that Desdemona has never received any jewels but that Iago, as go-between, has kept them. Iago, therefore, must begin to shut mouths.

He begins by promising Roderigo that he will have Desdemona the very next night if he can manage to keep Othello on the island that long. Iago explains that Othello has been recalled and ordered to a distant country (another lie). This is to force Roderigo to act, for it will seem to him that Desdemona is about to move utterly beyond his grasp. Iago says:

> … he [Othello] goes into Mauritania
> and taketh away with him the fair Desdemona,
> unless his abode be lingered here by some accident;

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 224-26

Mauritania was the name given in ancient times to the northwest shoulder of Africa, the region now called Morocco. It may be used here as a vague term, meaning "land of the Moors," that is, north Africa generally.

Iago arranges to have Roderigo attempt to find occasion to kill Cassio, since the death of Othello's appointed successor would force the Moor to remain on the island for a while. (From Iago's standpoint, this will get rid of the hated Cassio, and Othello has ordered him to do that; and he will find occasion, we can well imagine, to take care of Roderigo too.)

> … that Promethean heat

Matters now rush to their horrible climax. It is night and Desdemona, in almost unbearable depression, goes to bed.

Cassio, returning from time spent with his ladylove, is set upon by Roderigo. They fight and both are wounded. Men come running, and Iago, finding that Cassio is not dead, makes the best of matters by killing Roderigo and shutting his mouth at least.

While that is going on, Othello is trying to do his part. He comes upon Desdemona sleeping and even now finds he still hesitates. He looks from the candle he carries to the sleeping woman and says:

> // / quench thee, thou flaming minister,
> I can again thy former light restore,
> Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,
> Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
> I know not where is that Promethean heat
> That can thy light relume.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 8-13

Prometheus, in the Greek myths, had first made man the gift of fire, stealing it from the sun (see page I-437). A later myth also made him the creator of man. He was supposed to have made clay models into which he breathed life.

Othello's reference to "Promethean heat" is therefore a double-barreled allusion. It refers to Prometheus' connection with the sun's fire; not just ordinary fire but a special kind. Secondly, it refers to Prometheus' ability to infuse cold and lifeless clay with the warmth of a living human body; and that ability Othello lacks.

> … the very error of the moon

Othello no longer raves. He goes about the task of killing with a cold sorrow. Desdemona wakes and Othello accuses her of having given the handkerchief to Cassio. He will not accept her denial but tells her Cassio is dead (he assumes Iago has done his work properly), and Desdemona's terror at that news seems to him to be the final admission.

He strangles her with her pillow and even while he is forcing his weight down on her fragile neck, there is a clamor at the door. Emilia demands entrance. Othello closes the bed curtains and lets her in. Emilia has come to tell of the deadly fight between Roderigo and Cassio.

Othello says calmly:

> It is the very error of the moon.
> She comes more nearer earth than she was wont
> And makes men mad.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 108-10

It has always been tempting to think that changes in the heavens bring about analogous changes on the earth (something that is the basis of the pseudo science of astrology). The regular changes of the moon from new to full and back again would seem to imply that certain passions or foibles of men would wax and wane in sympathy.

In particular, mental abnormalities would wax with the moon, and there are the well-known legends that men turn into werewolves under the full moon, that witchcraft is most dangerous then, and so on. Spells of madness would vary with the moon's phases too by this line of thought, and the very word "lunatic" is derived from the Latin word for the moon.

And of course, if the moon approached more closely to the earth than usual, its effects would be multiplied.

… towards his feet. ..

But now Othello finds out Cassio is not killed, merely wounded. That staggers him.

A faint cry from the bed reveals that Desdemona is not quite dead, either. She lives only long enough to try one last time to shield Othello, and weakly claims she killed herself.

Othello, trying desperately to cling to the certainty that he did the right thing, boldly proclaims he killed her for her infidelity, and now Emilia comes into her own. She shrieks her utter faith in Desdemona's virtue.

Others, including Iago, come bursting in in response to Emilia's cries and find Desdemona dead. Iago must admit he told Othello of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, and now comes his doom. The matter of the handkerchief comes up and Emilia reveals the truth. She had found the handkerchief and given it to Iago.

Then-too late, too late-Othello understands. He tries to kill Iago, who evades him, stabs Emilia, and runs.

Emilia dies, but Iago is brought back a prisoner. Othello looks at him through the hellish mist that now surrounds him and says, brokenly:

/ look down towards his feet-but that's a fable.

—Act V, scene ii, line 282

This takes us back to one of the more joyous aspects of the pagan religions of the Greeks and Romans. They peopled the woods and wilds with spirits representing the free, animal fertility of life. The Greek satyrs and the Roman fauns were pictured as men with goats' horns and hindquarters, possibly because goats were always pictured as lustful animals. (Then too, goats may well have been the first creatures to be domesticated for meat and milk and it was important that they be lustful and multiply.) The most important of the satyrs was Pan himself.

The sexually strait-laced Jews (and, later, Christians) viewed all fertility deities with disapproval and suspicion, and to the Jews the satyrs (or similar creatures in Eastern cults) were *sairrim,* which the King James Bible translates as "devils." They tempted mankind to sin.

The devil, Satan, is usually pictured, even today, with horns, tail, and other goatish characteristics. He is still a satyr or, in particular, Pan. Medieval legends had it that the devil could take on many undevilish disguises, but that he could not abandon all his marks. Whatever he did, there remained one trace of goatishness; that is, a goat's cloven hoof. Hence the expression "to show the cloven hoof," meaning to reveal the hidden evil in one's character.

Othello looks toward Iago's feet to see the cloven hoof that would indicate the devil and interrupts himself mournfully with his "-but that's a fable."

He has learned! Till now he has believed the fables from Pliny, he has believed in magic handkerchiefs and sibyls, in crocodiles and moon-bred lunacy-and, of course, in Iago too.

Now, for the first time, he has discovered the necessity of skepticism-far too late.

> Demand me nothing. ..

As all of Iago's lies and trickeries are exposed, the confused Othello wants to know but one thing. Why did Iago do it? The audience wants to know too, since the revenge went far beyond anything necessary to punish Iago's grievances. But Iago says:

> Demand me nothing.
> What you know, you know.
> From this time forth I never will speak word.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 299-300

Ludovico threatens to make him talk under torture, but it seems reasonable to suppose that no torture will make Iago talk. This failure to say why has irritated many, but, in my opinion, it should not. Iago's pleasure at manipulating lives was intense and it is something we can all understand, for, in a much milder way, it is present in all men-and yet it is not something that can be easily explained.

> … the base Judean…

Now it is only necessary to take Othello back to Venice so that he might be tried for murder.

Othello, however, has one last thing to say. With an effort, he manages to pull himself together into almost the man he once was and speaks once more, a little in self-pity, much more in self-hate. He asks them all to tell the tale honestly, saying:

> Then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe…

—Act V, scene ii, lines 339-44

In many editions of the play, the phrase "like the base Judean" is made to read "like the base Indian." It seems to me that "Judean" is much the more preferable. If "Indian" is used, the allusion is obscure; if "Judean" is used, it is brilliantly apparent.

In Matthew 13:45-46, Jesus is reported as saying "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

It is easy to envision Jesus (who, in the Christian view, represented the kingdom of heaven) as being the pearl of great price more valuable than all else in the world besides. The Jews, in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, would then be pictured as throwing away the pearl of great price. In particular, Judas, who betrayed Jesus, would be the "base Judean."

From this point of view, the extent of Othello's self-hatred is clear. He compares his murder of Desdemona with the crucifixion of Jesus,

and himself with Judas.

> … in Aleppo once Othello goes on to say:
> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th'throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him-thus.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 348-52

With the last word, before anyone can stop him, Othello stabs himself, falls upon Desdemona in a final kiss, and dies.

This last pathetic passage cannot be taken literally. Aleppo is a city in what is now northwestern Syria, and (except for a brief period in 969) it has been Moslem for over thirteen centuries. If Othello killed a Turk in Aleppo, he was killing him in the midst of a city of Turks and it is not likely he would have got away alive.

He must mean something else…

The Moslems and Jews were marked off from the Christians by being circumcised; that is, a flap of skin at the end of the penis was removed. "Uncircumcised dog" was a common derogatory phrase for Christians among the Moslems, indicating that they were outside the pale of the true religion. Othello's use of the reverse phrase in his last agony is like a return to his origins.

After all, if Othello was Moslem originally, conversion to Christianity in later life could not utterly wipe out the tricks of speech he had learned as a young man. Furthermore, he would still be circumcised; baptism may cause one to be born again in the spiritual sense, but it cannot grow a new foreskin.

Othello therefore pictures himself as having returned to his origins, of having forgotten the Christian virtues of forgiveness, of having become "a malignant and a turbaned Turk." He beat a Venetian (Desdemona). He also traduced (defamed) himself; robbing himself of his own fame and reputation by his actions; and insofar as he was the representative of the state in Cyprus, he traduced the state.

So he took by the throat "the circumcised dog" (himself) and killed him.

> O Spartan dog

It is the end. The destruction has been complete, and Iago's plot

has worked itself out to the final bit. That Iago himself is trapped and is to be destroyed by torture must seem quite irrelevant to him. The victory is his.

Ludovico says to Iago bitterly:

> O Spartan dog,
> More jell than anguish, hunger, or the sea!
> Look on the tragic loading of this bed.
> This is thy work.

—Act V, scene ii, lines 357-60

A "Spartan dog" is a bloodhound, one that is trained to hunt and kill, and therefore a cruel and bloodthirsty person.

But does Ludovico expect Iago's conscience to be touched? It is precisely "the tragic loading of this bed" that is his victory, and one can imagine that Iago, wounded and pinioned and with the certainty of agonizing torture awaiting him, must, as he looks upon the bed, smile.

So the play ends-and the manner of its ending reflects history too, in a way, for all that the play is utter fiction from beginning to end.

The Battle of Lepanto, however much of a glorious victory it seemed to Europeans, and however much of a psychological boost it gave them, had no military value. Within a year the Turks had replaced their losses and were as powerful as ever at sea. The Christian allies, having won their victory, quarreled among themselves and did nothing more. The Venetians were left to face the Turks alone. The war on Cyprus continued to go against them, and in 1573 the Venetians yielded and ceded Cyprus to the Turks, who were to keep it for three centuries.

And so, just as Othello's coming to Cyprus may be compared to the victory at Lepanto, so his death seems to signify the valuelessness of that victory and the ultimate loss of Cyprus to the enemy.

24. Measure For Measure

In this play, written in 1604, Shakespeare takes the opportunity to study the relationship of justice and mercy. He had done so in *The Merchant of Venice,* but there he had not been consistent. Portia had demanded mercy of Shylock, but when the tables were turned she did not show it (see page I-539).

We all favor mercy for those with whom we sympathize, but are not nearly as keen when mercy is sought for those we hate. In this play Shakespeare carries through the notion of mercy to ultimate consistency, and in offering mercy to the villain makes many critics unhappy. In presenting an unpleasant situation so that the offering of mercy becomes hard indeed, more critics are made unhappy. The result is that Shakespeare's great play of mercy is usually considered one of his unpleasant comedies, like *All's Well That Ends Well.*

.. any in Vienna…

The setting of the play is in Austria. This setting Shakespeare takes over from a tale by Cynthius; a tale from the same collection, in fact, from which he had a year earlier or less taken the plot for *Othello* (see page I-609).

Cynthius' tale begins with the Emperor Maximian appointing a new judge over the city of Innsbruck. There was a real Emperor Maximian who ruled over the Roman Empire, along with Diocletian, from 286 to 305, but there is no indication that the play takes place in Roman tunes.

The name may have been inspired to Cynthius by the fact that two Holy Roman emperors named Maximilian ruled in the sixteenth century. The first, Maximilian I, ruled from 1493 to 1519, and the second, Maximilian II, became Emperor in 1564. He was on the throne when Cynthius' collection was published in 1565.

The two Maximilians, like all the emperors after 1438, were members of the House of Habsburg, who ruled, specifically, as archdukes of Austria.

Shakespeare shifts the scene from Innsbruck, a provincial town in western Austria, to Vienna, the capital, but he is writing a Renaissance romance, and all the characters have Italian names. Thus, the Archduke of Austria and presumably Holy Roman Emperor (but referred to only as "Duke" in the play) is Vincentio.

The Duke is planning to retire for a while from the tasks of government and intends to appoint a deputy to wield his powers. He suggests his candidate to an aged lord, Escalus, who approves and says:

> // any in Vienna be of worth
> To undergo such ample grace and honor
> It is Lord Angela.

—Act I, scene i, lines 22-24

Angela is given the post, though he is reluctant, and the Duke then leaves in great haste.

> … the King of Hungary …

The scene then shifts to a Viennese street, where we are introduced to Lucio, who is listed in the cast of characters as "a fantastic." He is fantastic in costume and conversation, in other words; he is avant-garde, ahead of the fashion, a gay man about town.

He is talking to two unnamed Gentlemen and says:

> // the Duke, with the other dukes,
> come not to composition with the King of Hungary,
> why then all the dukes fall upon the King.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 1-3

Nothing further is mentioned of this, of any threat of war, of the King of Hungary; nor is there any hint as to who "the other dukes" might be.

Hungary is Austria's eastern neighbor. Through the Middle Ages it was an extensive and often powerful kingdom which was, however, weakened by the existence of a turbulent aristocracy whose quarrels among themselves worked to the ruin of all.

Hungary had reached its height a little over a century before *Measure for Measure* was written, when, from 1458 to 1490, Mathias Corvinus ruled. He temporarily broke the power of the Hungarian nobility, spread his power northward over Slovakia and Silesia, and in 1485 even conquered Vienna. He made Vienna his capital and ruled

over Austria.

Corvinus died in 1490 and his weak successor gave up the earlier conquests and let the nobility gradually regain their power. The real disaster, however, came in 1526, when the Ottoman Turks (see page I-520) invaded Hungary and destroyed the Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohacs. By 1540 the major part of Hungary had been made part of the Ottoman Empire and the western fringe was taken over by the Austrian Duke, Ferdinand I.

… nineteen zodiacs…

The talk shifts almost at once to internal affairs. It seems that a wave of puritanism is sweeping over Vienna and a moral crackdown is in process. Older laws against sexual immorality, which had been allowed to lapse, are now being drawn noose-tight and houses of prostitution in the suburbs are being closed down.

What's more, a young nobleman, Claudio, is being haled off to prison for moral offenses. He is engaged to Juliet, but the marriage had been delayed while the matter of a dowry was being negotiated and meanwhile Juliet has managed to get pregnant.

The Duke's deputy, Angelo, a man of rigid and unassailable virtue (his very name means "angel"), is applying the law against unmarried intercourse to the extreme and Claudio will be slated for execution.

Claudio, in this deep trouble, stops to talk to his friend Lucio and complains of being thus struck down by penalties:

> Which have, like unscoured armor, hung by th'wall
> So long, that nineteen zodiacs have gone round
> And none of them been worn…

—Act I, scene ii, lines 168-74

The sun travels once around the zodiac in one year. Nineteen zodiacs are therefore nineteen years.

Lucio advises Claudio to appeal to the Duke, but the Duke is not to be found. Claudio therefore asks Lucio to hasten to a nunnery where his (Claudio's) sister is about to take her vows. Perhaps she will plead with Angelo on his behalf and win him over.

… to Poland

But the Duke has not really left after all. He wishes to observe affairs while remaining unobserved, see how the moral reform will work out, and so on. The Duke explains this to a monk, Friar Thomas, saying that even Angelo, his deputy, doesn't know the truth:

> … he supposes me traveled to Poland;
> For so I have strewed it in the common ear,

—Act I, scene iii, lines 13-15

In Shakespeare's time Poland was much larger than it is today. It bordered on Austria (and what had once been Hungary) to the northeast, and included large sections of what is now the Soviet Union. It extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea and was almost at the peak of its territorial expansion. But the aristocracy in Poland, as in Hungary, was uncontrollable and kept the central government weak.

> … snow-broth…

Lucio reaches Isabella (Claudio's sister) at the nunnery. She has not yet made her final vows and she may speak to him. He tells her of Claudio's situation. Claudio cannot make amends by marrying the girl he has made pregnant because Angelo is intent on setting an example. Lucio has no great hopes that Angelo can be swerved from this, for the man is icily virtuous. Lucio describes Angelo as

> a man whose blood
> Is very snow-broth…

—Act I, scene iv, lines 57-59

The implication is that he cannot feel the stirrings of passion and cannot sympathize with those who do. Under the lash of virtue he would insist upon a rigid justice that would be as cruel as anything vice would demand.

Yet, as a last resort, Lucio urges Isabella to go to Angelo and plead with him. He might be softened by a girl's request.

The chances of success are sum, however, for in the next scene Angelo is shown in conversation with Escalus and he insists on the letter of the law firmly. Strict justice and nothing but justice is what

he demands, and he gives orders that Claudio be executed the next morning at 9 a.m.

… at Hallowmas. ..

The gravity of the developing situation with respect to Claudio is lightened by a scene in which a comic constable, Elbow, has arrested Pompey, who works as servant in a brothel, and Froth, who has been a customer there. Both are brought before Angelo and Escalus for judgment.

When Pompey begins to testify, however, he does so with a long-windedness that weaves round and round the point without ever coming to it. It drags in even the exact time of the death of Froth's father. Pompey says:

Was't not at Hallowmas, Master Froth?

—Act II, scene i, lines 123-24

Froth answers with grave precision:

All-hallond Eve.

—Act II, scene i, line 125

"Hallowmas," which is also "All Hallows' Day," is a day set aside for the celebration of all the saints generally, known and unknown, and it is also known as "All Saints' Day." The celebration is on November 1, which happens, by no great coincidence, to be an important pastoral holiday of the ancient Celts. Many of the ancient customs of the earlier pagan holiday have come down to us, transfigured by Christian disapproval, and have given us a melange of witches and hobgoblins.

The night, naturally, is the best time for the spirits of darkness, and since in ancient times (among the Jews, for instance) the twenty-four-hour day included the sunlit period plus the night before, rather than the night after, it was the night of October 31 that was witch time. This is the "All-hallond Eve" that Froth refers to, or "All Hallows' Eve" or "All Saints' Eve," or, as it is best known today, Halloween.

… a night in Russia

Angelo, whose virtue leaves him no room for humor, leaves in disgust, allowing Escalus to render judgment, and saying:

> This will last out a night in Russia,
> When nights are longest there.

—Act II, scene i, lines 133-34

In Shakespeare's time Russia was just impinging on west European consciousness (see page I-154). At that time Russian territory had already reached the Arctic Ocean, and in 1553 an English trade mission under Richard Chancellor reached that nation through the one port that was open to the sea powers of the West-Archangel, on the Arctic shore.

It was this which gave England the notion of Russia as an essentially Arctic nation; a notion that was never quite wiped out of European consciousness. There were parts of Russia that were farther south than any part of England, even in the sixteenth century, before still further expansion southward had taken place. What counted, though, was the latitude of Archangel, which is only a hundred miles south of the Arctic Circle. "When nights are longest there" (in December and January) they are over twenty-three-hours long-though much of that time is twilit

… a shrewd Caesar …

The mild Escalus, left to deal with Pompey and Froth, lets them go but warns them nut to be picked up again, for he does not wish to see them before him once more. He says to Pompey:

> // / do, Pompey,
> I shall beat you to your tent,
> and prove a shrewd Caesar to you;

—Act II, scene i, lines 247-49

The reference is, of course, to the Roman general Pompey and his

defeat by Julius Caesar (see page I-257).

As mercy does

Claudio's moment of execution is approaching, and now his sister, Isabella, comes to plead for his life. Yet she is as strictly virtuous as Angelo and has no great sympathy for her brother's sexual offense. She says (very Angelo-like):

There is a vice that most I do abhor,
And most desire should meet the blow of justice,

—Act II, scene ii, lines 29-30

Naturally, her cold plea doesn't touch Angelo and she is at once ready to give up. Lucio, however (who is the pattern of goodhearted vice throughout the play and makes a good contrast to the two examples of marble-hearted virtue), urges her to plead more passionately.

Fired at last, Isabella turns to the only legitimate pleas that can turn aside justice:

No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 59-63

Thus is the conflict of the play set forth clearly: justice versus mercy.

And as Isabella grows more eloquent, Angelo begins to thaw-but not out of mercy. He is attracted not so much by the reasoning as by the reasoner. He asks Isabella to return the next morning, and when he is left alone, he discovers to his surprise that he too has finally felt the stirrings of passion.

… but to die…

At the second meeting between Isabella and Angelo, Angelo is ready to offer the mercy that Isabella has begged, but only at the price of Isabella herself. It is now Isabella's turn to be unbendingly virtuous. She refuses the price even if that means her brother must die, doing so without hesitation, and marches off to inform her brother of that fact.

Claudio is horrified at the news Isabella brings him and, at first impulse, agrees that it is better for himself to die than for his sister to lose her virtue. But then he begins to think about death and he quails, saying:

> Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,
> To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,
> This sensible warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
> In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
> To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
> And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendant world; or to be worse than worst
> Of those that lawless and incertain thought
> Imagine howling-'tis too horrible!
> The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature is a paradise
> To what we fear of death.

—Act III, scene i, lines 118-32

This sounds a great deal like the various descriptions of the sufferings of the damned in hell in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

So Claudio asks his sister to sacrifice her virtue for him. We might expect from Isabella the mercy she had requested so movingly of Angelo. She might not give in to Claudio, but she might at least sympathize with his fear of death and forgive him his human weakness. She does not. As rigid and extreme as Angelo (before lust intervened), Isabella shrieks out at her brother:

> Die, perish! Might but my bending down
> Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
> I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
> No word to save thee.

—Act III, scene i, lines 144-47

… Mariana, the sister of Frederick…

But the Duke, disguised as a friar, has overheard the colloquy between brother and sister in the jail, and now he begins to take countermeasures. He insists on speaking to Isabella before she leaves and says to her:

Have you not heard speak of Mariana,
the sister of Frederick,
the great soldier who miscarried at sea?

—Act III, scene i, lines 212-14

There is no indication that this reference to Frederick implies any real person. We might point out, though, that there were a number of Fredericks involved in German and Austrian history. One of them, Frederick I Barbarossa, was Holy Roman Emperor from 1152 to 1190 and he was indeed a great warrior, the strongest of the medieval emperors. In his old age, when almost seventy, he joined the Third Crusade (the one in which Richard the Lion-Heart was involved, see page II-219) and in Asia Minor drowned in a river while bathing. This is close to having "miscarried at sea."

It turns out that this Mariana had been betrothed to Angelo, but when her brother was wrecked at sea, her dowry was lost and Angelo promptly and coldly broke the marriage contract (about par for his kind of virtue).

The Duke now proposes the exact device used by Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well,* which Shakespeare had written a year or two earlier. Isabella is to pretend to accede to Angelo and to insist that he stay with her only briefly and in silence. It will then be arranged to have Mariana substitute for Isabella. Angelo will pardon Claudio as payment, then be forced to marry Mariana when the truth is revealed.

… Pygmalion's images …

Pompey now comes onstage again. Once more he is arrested on the old charge of running a house of prostitution and this time there will be no mercy. When Lucio enters, Pompey recognizes an old

customer and friend and asks for him to intercede. Lucio, however, is quite heartless and makes a mere joke of it, saying:

> How now, noble Pompey!
> What, at the wheels of Caesar?
> Art thou led in triumph?
> What, is there none of Pygmalion's images,
> newly made woman, to be had now,
> for putting the hand in the pocket and extracting it clutched?

—Act III, scene ii, lines 44-48

Again there is the reference to Pompey and Caesar that, earlier, Escalus had used. Of course, Pompey was never led in triumph behind Caesar's chariot, for he died before that could be. And even if he had not died, it was not the custom of Roman generals to be awarded a triumph for their victories over other Roman generals. The metaphor is colorful, but inaccurate.

Pygmalion is a mythical character, whose story is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. He was a King of Cyprus who had carved a statue so beautiful that he fell in love with it. He prayed to Aphrodite to give him a wife resembling the statue and she did better. She had the statue come to life, and Pygmalion did indeed marry her.

Lucio's reference to "newly made woman" plays on words bawdily, referring both to Pygmalion's come-to-life statue and to prostitutes who have just completed a turn. In the latter sense, they would have money that Pompey could make use of in order to bribe his way to freedom.

> … the Emperor of Russia

The Duke/Friar is also onstage and Lucio lingers to talk to him, not recognizing him as Duke, of course. Lucio quotes some rumors, saying of the Duke:

> Some say he is with the Emperor of Russia,

—Act III, scene ii, line 89

In 1472 Ivan III, till then Grand Duke of Muscovy, married Sophia, niece of the last Byzantine Emperor. Ivan thereupon claimed

the throne of the Empire (now defunct, actually) for himself and assumed the title of Tsar ("Caesar"). In Western Europe this title was translated into "Emperor," and Russia remained under a tsar-emperor for nearly four and a half centuries.

Lucio, out of sheer high spirits and a mischievous desire to shock a holy man, goes on to repeat all sorts of slanders against the Duke. When the Friar makes plain his indignation over this, Lucio increases his slanders, accusing the Duke of unbridled lust, drunkenness, and ignorance.

> … come Philip and Jacob…

Lucio goes off laughing, but he has tried to be funny at a very unfortunate time for himself. Mistress Overdone, the proprietress of a bawdy-house, is also being arrested, and she believes it was Lucio who bore witness against her. She therefore accuses Lucio, in turn, to Escalus. It seems that he has had a child by one of the prostitutes of her house. She says:

> Mistress Kate Keepdown was with child by him
> in the Duke's time; he promised her marriage;
> his child is a year and a quar ter old,
> come Philip and Jacob; I have kept it myself…

—Act III, scene ii, lines 202-5

St. Philip and St. James, two of the apostles, are together commemorated on May 1. The Hebrew name of James is Jacob. "Come Philip and Jacob" therefore means "next May 1."

> A Bohemian born …

The plot to deceive Angelo is completed. Mariana is introduced; it is explained to her what she must do and she agrees.

But Angelo, once he has slept with Mariana (thinking she was Isabella), fears the discovery of the sin. If he pardons Claudio, everyone will be astonished and ready to believe something unusual has happened. If Isabella talks, her tale would be accepted. If, however, Claudio is executed, who would then believe Isabella's story?

Therefore, even as the Duke/Friar waits for notice of Claudio's

reprieve, a letter to the Provost (the keeper of the prison) arrives from Angelo, ordering the execution of Claudio and, in addition, of someone named Barnardine.

The Duke/Friar asks who Barnardine is and the Provost replies:

> A Bohemian born,
> but here nursed up and bred;

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 133-34

Bohemia (now part of modern Czechoslovakia) is the westernmost Slavic region of Europe. The fourteenth century was its golden age and its King, Charles I, was Holy Roman Emperor from 1347 to 1378. Bohemia declined after that, chiefly through internal religious strife.

After 1462 Bohemia was ruled by Hungary, and when the latter country was defeated by the Turks, Bohemia was taken over by the Austrian House of Habsburg. Bohemia remained Austrian through Shakespeare's life and for three centuries afterward.

> … pluck out his eyes

Barnardine, it seems, has been in prison for nine years for murder and now, all reprieves having been exhausted and his crime thoroughly proved, is ready for death. The Duke/Friar considers having his head sent to Angelo in place of Claudio's. It turns out, though, that a prisoner has died that morning of fever and he happens to resemble Claudio. It is that head which will be sent to Angelo, and Barnardine as well as Claudio will remain unexecuted.

Yet when Isabella comes to receive her reprieved brother, the Duke/ Friar tells her that her brother has been executed. Her instant cry is for revenge as she shrieks:

> O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!

—Act IV, scene iii, line 121

Some critics are appalled at the Duke's needless cruelty in hiding from Isabella the fact that her brother has been saved. The Duke's action seems reasonable to me, however. He was present when Isabella cruelly turned on her death-fearing brother and excoriated

him, saying she would pray for his death. Well, now she had what she prayed for. That might teach her a little something about justice and mercy and she would later have an opportunity to learn a little more. (Besides, one is entitled to wonder whether she is more outraged at the death of her brother or at the fact that her sacrificed virtue-which Angelo thought he had-was so little valued by him.)

> "… death for death"

Now begins a charade arranged by the Duke. He returns to Vienna in his own guise and is so greeted. Isabella (following the instructions of the Friar, not knowing him to be the Duke) accuses Angelo of having insisted on her body as the price of her brother and then having had the brother executed anyway. Angelo denies everything and the Duke affects to believe him and orders Isabella punished.

Mariana joins in the accusation against Angelo and the whole story comes out, but still Angelo denies and still the Duke refuses to accept the accusation.

It turns out that a Friar has urged the women to make the accusation and the question turns to him. Lucio, out of sheer love of mischief, accuses the Friar of having slandered the Duke, putting his own words into the Friar's mouth.

The Duke retires, returns as Friar, and he too is ordered arrested. Lucio abuses him quite gratuitously and pulls off the Friar's hood. All freeze in astonishment as the Duke's face is revealed.

And now the Duke speaks in earnest for the first time since his return. It is his task to represent mercy and his first words are to pardon Escalus the harsh words he addressed to the Friar, not knowing that behind the cowl was the Duke.

Angelo has no choice now but to confess his guilt and ask for death. The Duke, however, is in no hurry for that. First there is a kind justice (not a cruel one) to be done Mariana. She must be given the social status that goes with marriage. Angelo and Mariana are therefore taken offstage to be married.

Isabella asks forgiveness for having, unknowingly, treated the Duke as less than a Duke and she receives pardon freely.

And then Angelo, returning as a married man, must hear sentence passed against him. The Duke offers him his own kind of justice and suggests that mercy itself would demand merciless justice, and would cry out:

> "An Angelo for Claudio, death for death!"
> Haste still [always] pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;

Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.

—Act V, scene i, lines 412-14

It is the cry of rigid return of damage for damage and is usually recognized as among the primitive ethics of early religious development. It reminds one of the passage in the Old Testament which says: "And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24:19-20). In a way, of course, this was an attempt at limitation of revenge. If one man knocked out another's tooth, revenge must not take the form of killing, but satisfy itself with no more than knocking out a tooth in return. Nevertheless, the doctrine of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" sounds barbaric to those who make no such fetish of exact justice.

It is usually thought that the Old Testament doctrine quoted above was repudiated by the New Testament, for Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Matthew 5:38-39).

But then later in the same sermon, Jesus says: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:1-2).

This latter passage may refer to divine judgment, but it can be applied to human judgments; and whether divine or human, it is eye for eye and tooth for tooth all over again.

It is the New Testament passage which the play counters, for it is the New Testament passage that gives the play its title.

Let Mm not die

Mariana pleads for Angelo's life, but he is her husband and she loves him. It is easy for her to want mercy for the man. What about Isabella?

To Isabella, Angelo is nothing but a villain. He tried to rob her of both her virginity and her brother, and as far as she knows, the brother is *indeed* lost. She has no reason to want mercy, every reason to want revenge. Mariana pleads with her and slowly Isabella kneels. She says to the Duke:

/ partly think

A due sincerity governed his deeds,
Till he did look on me.
Since it is so, Let him not die,

—Act V, scene i, lines 448-51

That is why it was necessary for the Duke not to reveal to Isabella that her brother lived. She had to forgive Angelo at the worst. She had to learn mercy at last.

Angelo is therefore pardoned and for this many critics (as savage as Angelo) condemn the play, because they want to see the man hanged. Yet is it only for those with whom we sympathize that mercy is to be sought? If that is so, then what credit is there in mercy and why should we have expected Shylock to show mercy for an Antonio with whom he did not sympathize, or for Angelo to show mercy for a Claudio with whom he did not sympathize? It is precisely to those whom we hate that we must show mercy if the word is to have meaning at all.

Thy slanders I forgive …

But the Duke has one more person to teach-himself. After pardons are granted all round, even to the wicked murderer, Barnardine, the Duke finds there is one person he cannot pardon-the one who has sinned directly against himself. This is Lucio, who has slandered him.

The Duke orders Lucio to marry the prostitute on whom he has fathered a child and, afterward, to be whipped and hanged.

Lucio seems to be more dismayed at the disgrace of the marriage than at the rest and manages to be witty even at this last moment. Whereupon the Duke, with an effort, manages to be merciful on his own account too. He says:

Upon mine honor, thou shalt marry her.
Thy slanders I forgive; and therewithal
Remit thy other forfeits.

—Act V, scene i, lines 521-23

Then, in his last speech, the Duke indicates pretty clearly that he intends to marry Isabella, and thus ends the play.

25. The Tempest

Although *The Tempest* is usually found first in editions presenting the collected works of Shakespeare, it is actually the last play to be written entirely by Shakespeare, its date being 1611. His only work afterward consisted of his contributions to Fletcher's plays *Henry VIII* (see page II-743) and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (see page I-53).

In a way, it is pleasing that Shakespeare ended with *The Tempest,* for this marks a return to his sunny comedies written over a decade earlier. We may be glad that the great man ended his career on an upbeat.

What's more, *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's complete creation too, for it is one play in which he apparently made up his own plot.

Good boatswain…

The play opens with a ship struggling against a tempest. On board are a group of Italian noblemen, for here, as in so many of his other romances, Shakespeare uses Italy as the home of romance.

The crew is desperately trying to save the ship when the Italian aristocrats emerge from below. One speaks, saying:

Good boatswain, have care.
Where's the master? Play the men.

—Act I, scene i, lines 9-10

The speaker is Alonso, King of Naples, and with him on the ship is his brother, Sebastian, and his son, Ferdinand. The kingdom of Naples was from about 1100 down to 1860 the political unit making up the southern half of the Italian peninsula, with Sicily usually (but not always) included. Its capital was the city of Naples.

Alonso is not a typically Italian name. It is a Spanish one, a variant of Alfonso. Both Sebastian and Ferdinand are names best known in history as belonging to Spanish and Portuguese monarchs, rather than to Italians. This is not surprising, for Naples in Shakespeare's time was closely connected with Spain.

In 1420 Naples was under the rule of the aging Queen Joanna II, who had no heirs and who feared that the French would seize her kingdom. Nearby Sicily was under the rule of Alfonso V of Aragon (see page I-545) and she made him heir to her rule. She changed her mind

afterward, but Alfonso V had no mind to retire. After she died in 1435, he began a long struggle to fix himself on the Neapolitan throne. By 1443 he had succeeded and made Naples the capital of his entire dominion, including Aragon itself. He reigned as Alfonso I of Naples.

Aragon continued to rule Naples until 1479, when Aragon and Castile formed a dynastic union that gave rise to modern Spain. The united Spanish kingdom continued to rule Naples through Shakespeare's time and beyond. At the time *The Tempest* was written, Naples was ruled by a viceroy serving the Spanish King, Philip III…

In thinking of Naples, then, Shakespeare automatically thinks Spanish even when he treats it as an independent kingdom. (In *Othello,* such characters as Roderigo and Iago have Spanish names even though they are supposedly Venetians.)

> … the Duke of Milan…

Despite the royalty on board, the ship is apparently sinking and must be abandoned.

The events do not go unobserved, however. There is an island nearby -not one that can be pinned down on a map-but one that exists only in this tale. All we can say is that it ought to be located somewhere between Italy and the African shore.

Two individuals are all the truly human inhabitants the island of the play has: a man, Prospero, and his daughter, Miranda.

The daughter is terribly perturbed over the ship, which is being destroyed in the tempest, but Prospero calms her and assures her that no harm will be done. He says it is now time, at last, to tell her of their past and how they came to be on the island.

> Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since,
> Thy father was the Duke of Milan and
> A prince of power.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 53-55

Milan is a duchy in northern Italy (see page I-447).

> … rapt in secret studies

Prospero, as Duke, had little interest in governing and left the actual conduct of affairs to his brother, Antonio, while he himself was

concerned with scholarship:

> The government I cast upon my brother
> And to my state grew stranger, being transported
> And rapt in secret studies.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 75-77

In the Middle Ages there were two kinds of studies: that of theology and related philosophy, which was considered the highest goal of reason; and that of the secular knowledge of the world.

The latter was suspect for a number of reasons. It had its roots in the pagan learning of the Greeks, for one thing. For another, the secular scholars (notably the alchemists) actually cultivated an air of mysticism that reinforced vague beliefs that they consorted with spirits and practiced magic. Naturally, the general public would fear such scholars and suspect that there was much more to their work than they could possibly admit.

And indeed, it becomes clear that Prospero's "secret studies" did indeed involve magic, that he could command spirits and control portions of the universe.

> This King of Naples. ..

Prospero's preoccupation with his books and studies allowed his brother, Antonio, to intrigue for the throne. Antonio came to an understanding with Alonso of Naples (the same who was on the ship caught in the tempest).

Prospero says:

> This King of Naples, being an enemy
>
> To me inveterate, hearkens to my brother's suit;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 121-22

The King of Naples therefore sent an army to Milan. Antonio treacherously opened the city gates so that Milan was taken and then ruled as new Duke, but tributary to Naples.

Though *The Tempest* is fictional throughout, there is an echo of history here. In 1535 the last native Duke of Milan, Francesco Maria

Sforza, died without heirs. The duchy was taken over by Emperor Charles V (see page II-747), who in 1540 gave it to his son, who was later to be Philip II of Spain. Milan remained Spanish throughout Shakespeare's life and for nearly a century beyond. And since Naples had been Spanish before that, it is almost as though Naples had taken Milan.

As it happens, Antonio, the usurper, is also on the sinking ship, along with the King of Naples.

… a cherubin

Once the *coup d'etat* had been effected, Prospero and Miranda were taken away, placed on a small ship, and set afloat on the Mediterranean. Fortunately, a sympathetic Neapolitan lord, Gonzalo, made it possible for them to survive the ordeal by secretly giving them clothing and other necessaries and, most of all, a number of the most valuable books from Prospero's library. And, as it happens, Gonzalo is also on the ship.

Miranda is affected by the tale but, in her gentle sympathy, does not think of her own danger then but only of the added trouble she must have been to her father. He denies that she was any trouble. Rather the reverse, for she was

O, a cherubin
Thou wast that did preserve me!

—Act I, scene ii, lines 152-53

A cherub is a creature mentioned in the Bible. From the wording in some places, it would seem to represent the storm blast. Thus, in Psalms 18:10 it is written: "And he [the Lord] rode upon a cherub and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind."

The cherub is nowhere described in the Bible except for the indication that it had wings. It may have been represented as a fearsome creature along the lines of the eagle-winged, man-headed bulls that were so characteristic a feature of Assyrian sculpture.

Whatever its origins, however, the cherub came to be considered as an infant angel and took the place in Christian art of the cupids of pagan art. It is in the sense of infant angel that Shakespeare uses the word here.

Incidentally, the Hebrew plural is, characteristically, indicated by an "-im" suffix, so that one can speak of one cherub, but two

cherubim. Such a plural is utterly foreign to English, of course, and the tendency is to consider cherubim (or cherubin) as a singular and then speak of cheru-bims or cherubins if the plural is needed. Shakespeare uses such a false singular here.

> … my Ariel.. .

Having completed his tale, Prospero makes Miranda sleep by his magical art and proceeds about the more serious business of the day. He calls to him the chief spirit at his command:

> Come away [here], servant, come! I am ready now.
> Approach, my Ariel! Come!

—Act I, scene ii, lines 187-88

Ariel is a spirit of the air, wild and free, and untainted by any form of earthiness or earth-bound humanity.

The name has a biblical sound. In Isaiah 29:1 the prophet says: "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!" The word means "lion of God" or possibly "hearth of God" and is meant as a poetic synonym for Jerusalem.

Yet it sounds like the name of a spirit or angel, since all the angelic names in the Bible and the Apocrypha end in the suffix "-el" (God), as Gabriel, Rafael, Azrael, and Uriel. The first part of the name, "Ari-" sounds like "airy," which makes it fitting for an airy spirit.

The name Ariel is also to be found in the heavens through a queer concatenation of events.

In 1787 the German-English astronomer William Herschel discovered two satellites of the planet Uranus (which he had discovered a few years earlier) and broke with the long-established custom of naming bodies of the solar system after Greek and Roman deities. Instead, he called them Titania and Oberon (see page I-28).

In 1851 the English astronomer William Lassell discovered two more satellites, closer to the planet, and went along with the spirit names. He called the new satellites Ariel and Umbriel.

These two spirits are from the poem *The Rape of the Lock* by the English poet Alexander Pope, published in 1712. In the poem, Ariel is the name given to a sylph who guards Belinda, the heroine. (It seems quite reasonable to suppose that Pope borrowed the name from Shakespeare.) Umbriel, on the other hand, is a melancholy spirit, always sighing and weeping, with a name suggested by the fact that

umbra is Latin for "shadow." Umbriel is always in the shadows and the name occurs nowhere else in literature.

Nevertheless, so much better known is *The Tempest* than *The Rape of the Lock* that the satellite Ariel is much more likely to be associated with the former than with the latter.

Thus, in 1948, when the Dutch-American astronomer Gerard P. Kuiper discovered a fifth satellite of Uranus, closer (and smaller) than any of the others, he automatically allowed Ariel to suggest another name from *The Tempest* and the new satellite he named "Miranda."

> I flamed amazement…

When Ariel arrives, it appears that the tempest is no true tempest but an appearance raised by magical arts, designed to frighten the men on the ship and set the stage for Prospero's plan to set all things to rights. Ariel explains how he carried out his task of creating panic:

> Now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
> I flamed amazement.
> Sometime I'd divide
> And burn in many places;

—Act I, scene ii, lines 196-99

Ariel was, in other words, converting himself into "St. Elmo's fire." This is the glow produced on dark, stormy nights by gathering static electricity, which is discharged from pointed objects. Such a discharge, if vigorous enough, will produce a glow.

It will appear on the points of masts or spars, for instance. If one glow is seen it is called "Helena" (in reference to Helen of Troy) and if it divides in two it is "Castor and Pollux" (the twin brothers of Helen).

There is no St. Elmo. The name is thought to be a corruption of "St. Erasmus," the patron saint of Mediterranean sailors. The glow was thought to be the visible sign of the saint guarding them during the storm.

> … the still-vexed Bermoothes …

Ariel carefully explains that no one has been hurt, although they have been separated: the King's son brought to shore alone; the other royalty brought to another place; the ship itself taken safe to harbor;

and the rest of the fleet sent sadly on its way thinking they had seen the flagship, with the King on board, wrecked.

Ariel describes the place where he has bestowed the ship, saying:

> Safely in harbor
> Is the King's ship; in the deep nook where once
> Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew
> From the still-vexed [always stormy] Bermoothes …

—Act I, scene ii, lines 226-29

The Bermoothes are the Bermudas, a group of small islands which, all together, are no larger than Manhattan. They had come dramatically into the news shortly before *The Tempest* was written.

In 1607 the English had made their first permanent settlement in what is now the United States, at Jamestown in Virginia. The settlement barely managed to survive its first few years and it required periodic infusions of new colonists and supplies from England to keep going. In 1609 a fleet of nine ships sailed westward to supply Jamestown.

A storm hit them off the Bermudas and the flagship, carrying the admiral and the new governor of Virginia, was separated from the rest. The remaining eight ships made it to Jamestown; the flagship did not and was given up for lost.

Apparently, though, it had managed to come ashore in the Bermudas and there its passengers and crew managed to eke a living until they could build two small boats that carried them west across the six hundred miles that separated them from the mainland. They showed up in Jamestown nearly a year after the storm and it was as though they had come back from the dead.

It was a sensation and the tale of the adventure filled England to the point where Shakespeare calls the islands "still-vexed" because of the association with the storm that wrecked the flagship, though the.Bermudas are not more stormy than other places. The description of the Bermudas by those who were stranded there so long was most favorable and Prospero's magic island seems modeled on the reports of Bermuda (which has remained British territory ever since).

In fact, there seems no question but that the tale of this shipwreck inspired Shakespeare to write *The Tempest*. There is a storm that separates the flagship from the fleet. Men are lost and yet not lost but are saved in almost miraculous fashion after spending time on an almost magical island. All Shakespeare had to do was add an Italian-style romance.

The foul witch Sycorax.. .

Pleased with himself, Ariel reminds Prospero that the long term of service he has rendered draws to a close and that he has been promised his freedom. Prospero, who is working out his climactic scheme, and needs only another day, is irritated, and reminds Ariel from what misery he had been rescued.

Prospero says:

Hast thou forgot
The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy
Was grown into a hoop?

—Act I, scene ii, lines 257-59

The name is an invention of Shakespeare's, though it may have arisen out of the combination of Greek words for "pig" and "crow." Prospero asks Ariel where Sycorax was born and the spirit answers:

Sir, in Argier.

—Act I, scene ii, line 260

Argier is a distorted version of Algiers, a city on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, 650 miles southwest of Naples. It had been founded in 950 as a Moslem town and has remained Moslem ever since. To the Christians of Europe, a Moslem town would seem like a natural birthplace for a witch.

Algiers had, besides, made the news in the sixteenth century. In 1545 Emperor Charles V had sent a fleet to Algiers, hoping to capture it. That fleet had been dispersed by a storm and the attempt ended in disaster. It was easy for good Christians to suppose that the diabolical Moslems had raised the storm by means of witchcraft and so it would seem natural to associate Sycorax with that city.

Sycorax was so evil a witch, however, as to have been banished even from Algiers. She was taken to the island that later became Prospero's and was left there.

She was a powerful witch and when Ariel would not obey her wicked commands, she imprisoned the spirit in a pine tree for twelve years. She died in that interval and Ariel might have remained

imprisoned forever, had not Prospero arrived and freed him. It was in gratitude for this that Ariel was serving Prospero.

… Caliban her son

When Sycorax died, however, she left something behind. She had been pregnant when brought to the island and had borne a child upon it whom Prospero describes as

A freckled whelp, hagborn, not honored with
A human shape.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 283-84

Ariel answers:

Yes, Caliban her son.

—Act I, scene ii, line 284

This Caliban, the offspring of a witch and, presumably, one of the devils that served her, is a semihuman monster, earthy, dull, and savage. The name has entered the language to mean any brutal and debased person. The name is Shakespeare's invention but it may be guessed that it was suggested by "cannibal," a word which had been made prominent by explorations of the New World (see page I-617).

… my dam's god, Setebos

Caliban is called forth to do some labor and appears, railing and cursing, misshapen and monstrous. He complains that it was his island before Prospero came and that now he has been enslaved, but Prospero insists that they had tried to treat him with humanity and kindness and that in response he had tried to rape Miranda.

Caliban, however he may wish to rebel, must do as he is told. He says:

/ must obey. His art is of such pow'r
It would control my dam's god, Setebos,
And make a vassal of him.

—Act I, scene ii, lines 372-74

Setebos was a god worshiped by the Patagonians of southern South America. He was first mentioned by Ferdinand Magellan, whose expedition in 1519-22 was the first to circumnavigate the world. Setebos then appeared in English in a book called *History of Travel* by Robert Eden, published in 1577. Apparently Shakespeare saw it there and thus another aspect of the New World entered the play.

… the King of Tunis

Prospero's plans continue to progress. Ariel leads Ferdinand, the young son of the King of Naples, to the cell. Ferdinand is in deep grief for his father, who, he is certain, is dead. Nevertheless, upon first sight of Miranda he falls head over heels in love. For her part, Miranda, who never saw a young man before, is equally smitten. Prospero is delighted, but, to test the youth, pretends anger and keeps them apart.

On another part of the island, the rest of the party is sunk in grief over the loss of Ferdinand. (These multiple griefs are part of the revenge Prospero is taking.) Gonzalo, the kindhearted old lord, is desperately trying to cheer up the King with cheerful conversation. They have their lives, he points out, and the island seems fruitful and comfortable. Besides, there are other blessings to be counted, for he says:

> Methinks our garments are now as fresh
> as when we put them on first in Afric,
> at the marriage of the King's fair daughter
> Claribel to the King of Tunis.

—Act II, scene i, lines 71-74

This tells us what the trip was all about. A royal party has crossed the Mediterranean from Naples to Tunis and it was on the return voyage that the tempest brought them to this island.

Tunis is at the point where Africa approaches most closely to Italy. It is. only 90 miles west of Sicily and but 350 miles southwest of Naples.

From the eighth century on, Tunis and the country surrounding it

had been Moslem, and this area is still Moslem today. It seems unlikely that Shakespeare would be describing the marriage of a Christian princess to a Moslem king.

But then, in 1535, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, had sent a naval expedition against Tunis (as ten years later he was to send one against Algiers). This earlier expedition had been successful and Tunis was taken with great slaughter. It was not a permanent conquest and did not in the least affect the Moslem character of the city, but it made a great stir and, presumably, Tunis emerged out of the shadows as the result of that victorious impingement of Christendom upon it.

… of Carthage. ..

The mention of Claribel causes everyone to praise her and to say that Tunis had never had so fair a queen. But Gonzalo brings up Dido (see page I-20) as a possible competitor. Adrian (one of the courtiers present) objects and says:

She [Dido] was of Carthage, not of Tunis.

—Act II, scene i, line 85

To which Gonzalo replies with equanimity:

This Tunis, sir, was Carthage.

—Act II, scene i, line 86

This statement is almost true.

Carthage was originally a Phoenician colony which had been utterly destroyed (after three wars) by Rome in 146 b.c. A new city was founded on the same site in 44 b.c. at the orders of Julius Caesar and was given the same name. The new Roman city was settled by Romans and Romanized Africans, however, and had nothing in common with the older Phoenician colony but the name and the site.

Roman Carthage flourished until 698, when it was finally taken by the Arabs. With that, it died a second time and this time forever, but Tunis, a dozen miles westward along the seashore, became great in its place. Tunis is *near* the site of Carthage, but, strictly speaking, it is wrong to say, as Gonzalo does, that it is Carthage. In fact, Tunis

(then called "Tunes") existed as a distinct and separate town when Roman Carthage was at its height.

… the miraculous harp

Antonio, the usurping King of Naples, comments on the fact that Gonzalo has, in a moment, re-created the vanished city of Carthage. He says:

His word is more than the miraculous harp.

—Act II, scene i, lines 89-90

This is a reference to the Greek myth of Amphion and Zethus, twin brothers, whose father had been ruler of Thebes but had been deposed and killed by a younger brother. (Odd that Antonio should make such a reference.) Amphion and Zethus captured Thebes from their usurping uncle and wished to fortify it against a counterattack. They therefore built a stone wall around the city. Zethus carried the stones and piled them near the wall while Amphion, playing a magic lyre (or harp), made the pile of stones move of their own accord into the wall.

The conversation continues until Ariel enters and causes all but Sebastian and Antonio to fall asleep.

Antonio, the wicked usurping brother of Prospero, takes the opportunity to urge Sebastian to kill *his* brother and become King of Naples in his place. Sebastian allows himself to be tempted, but when they draw their swords to kill the King, Ariel wakes all the sleepers and Sebastian and Antonio must pretend they had heard wild beasts and had drawn their swords for that reason. (Thwarted ambition is presumably another part of Prospero's revenge.)

… this mooncalf …

Meanwhile another pair of individuals are to be found wandering on the island. Trinculo, the King's jester, has escaped and is wandering aimlessly. So has Stephano, the King's butler.

Caliban sees Trinculo approaching and, in terrible fright, pretends he is dead. Trinculo finds him, doesn't know what to make of the half-human monster, but crawls under his garment to stay out of the last dregs of the tempest.

Stephano, who has salvaged some bottles of liquor, is carrying one and is 'drunk. He comes across the Caliban-Trinculo combination and views it as a monster with four legs and two voices. When Trinculo calls his name, Stephano is terrified and says:

> … This is a devil, and no monster.
> I will leave him; I have no long spoon.

—Act II, scene ii, lines 102-3

Stephano refers to the proverb which is usually quoted, now, as "Who sups with the devil must needs have a long spoon."

But Trinculo identifies himself before Stephano is out of earshot. Stephano returns, pulls Trinculo out from under Caliban's garment, and says:

> Thou art very Trinculo indeed!
> How cam'st thou to be the siege [excrement]
> of this mooncalf? Can he vent Trinculos?

—Act II, scene ii, lines 110-12

A mooncalf is the name given to the occasional deformed calf born of a cow, because this was thought to be due to the malign influence of the moon (see page I-629). Eventually, the expression came to be used for any monstrous form of life.

Stephano gives Caliban a drink and the grateful Caliban (who has never tasted liquor before) wishes to worship Stephano as a god, and suggests to him that he kill Prospero and become king of the island, making Miranda his queen. Stephano thinks this is a good idea and all three troop off on this errand. There is obviously no danger, though, for Ariel is (invisibly) on guard.

> … the phoenix' throne. ..

Prospero, meanwhile, has put Ferdinand to work moving logs, and though the young prince is engaged in a demeaning manual labor, he loves it because it gives him a chance to be near Miranda. And Miranda, when she enters, cannot bear to see him working, and tries to carry the logs for him. The love grows with every second and

Prospero, overhearing, is happy indeed.

The situation is not quite so pleasant for the King and his party. Gon-zalo is half dead with walking; and Sebastian and Antonio are still plotting the assassination. Suddenly, though, a banquet is set before them through Prospero's magic.

They are astonished, and Sebastian says, in stupefaction:

> Now I will believe
> That there are unicorns; that in Arabia
> There is one tree, the phoenix' throne; one phoenix
> At this hour reigning there.

—Act III, scene iii, lines 21-24

Sebastian compares the incredible sight they have seen with two other incredibles: the unicorn and the phoenix.

The unicorn is generally pictured as a horselike creature with a single spiral horn on its forehead. Belief in this creature originated from three sources.

First, the Bible speaks of unicorns. This, however, is a mistranslation of the Hebrew *re'em,* which is the aurochs or wild ox. The Assyrians showed these in bas-relief in profile so that only one horn showed. In the Greek translation of the Bible, *re'em* therefore became *monokeros* (one-horn) and in Latin *unicornis* (one-horn).

Second, there were dim tales of actual creatures with a single hornlike structure. These were the rhinoceroses, rumors of which reached Europe from India (the earliest report on record being contained in the writings of the Greek physician Ctesias about 400 b.c.).

Finally, there was the narwhal, a species of whale in which a single tooth (not a horn) formed a long, tapering spiral. These were brought back by sailors and called horns of unicorns, for as such they could be sold for fabulous sums for their supposed efficacy against poisoning. The effect of this was to make the horn of the unicorn appear in illustrations as though it was a transplanted narwhal tusk.

The phoenix is more fabulous still and had its origins, perhaps, as an Egyptian solar myth. The Egyptians used a calendar in which the year was considered to be exactly 365 days long (instead of 365 1/4). The extra quarter-day was ignored and the individual days crept ahead of the seasons from year to year, therefore, until they had made a complete circuit in 1461 Egyptian years (or 1460 actual years). In other words, if a particular star were directly overhead at midnight on New Year's Day, it would not be overhead at midnight on New Year's

Day for 1461 more years. This length of time was called the Sothic cycle because the Egyptians used Sirius as their reference star and in their language this star was called Sothis.

Perhaps this 1461-year cycle of the sun versus the Egyptian calendar was mythologized into a long-lived flaming bird which, after 1461 years, died and gave rise to a new bird like itself.

If so, the Greeks, who used a Babylonian calendar and not an Egyptian one and who therefore knew nothing of the Sothic cycle, altered the length of time to a rounder number-500 years is often mentioned. The bird is called the phoenix (from a word meaning "red-purple," as a hang-over perhaps from the Egyptian notion of a flaming sunlike bird).

There were all sorts of accretions to the myth-the nature of the flaming pyre in which the bird consumes itself, the details of the birth of the new bird, and so on. The place where the death and rebirth takes place also varies; some place the site, significantly enough, at Heliopolis, the Egyptian city at which the sun god was worshiped. Others place it in Arabia or India (on the basis that the farther east, the more wonderful).

There is only one phoenix at a time (as there is only one sun), and it seemed reasonable to suppose that if the phoenix immolated itself on a palm tree, it would be a palm tree as unique as itself. The Arabian desert is barren, so one can imagine it containing a single tree, the one on which the phoenix dies and is reborn.

> … the figure of this harpy…

Before the bemused and grateful travelers can eat, Ariel appears in horrible shape and the feast is taken away. Ariel denounces the malefactors for their treatment of Prospero. (The frustration of desire is another punishment and Alonso begins to feel remorse at his treatment of Prospero and to fear that the loss of his son is punishment therefore.) Prospero is pleased with Ariel's action and says:

> Bravely the figure of this harpy hast thou
> Performed, my Ariel…

—Act III, scene iii, lines 83-84

The Harpies were originally spirits personifying the storm winds-rather like the cherubs. The Greeks finally personified them as hag-

headed birds, with long talons and horrible screeches. Sometimes they were described as carrying off individuals.

The most famous myth concerning them, however, involves Phineus, a soothsayer in eastern Thrace who incurred the anger of the gods. He was bunded and condemned to eternal hunger, for whenever food was placed on the table, Harpies would descend shrieking, snatching away some and fouling the rest. The Harpies were driven away at last by Jason and his men (see page I-505).

The fame of the myth fixed this particular picture of the Harpy and made it appropriate for Ariel to assume the guise of one when the feast was snatched away from the Neapolitan King and his followers.

> Ceres, most bounteous lady. ..

But Ferdinand's ordeal is over. Prospero is satisfied with him and tells him that he may marry his daughter. To make up for the pain caused him, Prospero puts on a spirit show for the happy couple. The classical goddesses are brought down to bless them.

Iris comes in first, calling on another:

> Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas
> Of wheat, rye, barley, fetches, oats, and peas;

—Act IV, scene i, lines 60-61

Ceres (the Roman version of the Greek goddess Demeter) is the personification of the cultivated and fruitful soil, and all the food it produces. (We get our word "cereal" from her name.) She is naturally one whose blessing will ensure a fruitful marriage. After having enumerated Ceres' products, Iris says:

> — the queen o'th'sky,
> Whose wat'ry arch and messenger am I,
> Bids thee leave these, and with her sovereign grace,
> Here on this grass plot, in this very place,
> To come and sport; her peacocks fly amain.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 70-74

The "queen o'th'sky" would be Juno, of course (the Greek Hera),

who is that because she is the wife of Jupiter (Zeus). Juno was considered by the Romans to have marriage and motherhood as her prime concern; she was the idealized wife. It was her place, therefore, to preside over the festivities on this occasion. The peacock was considered particularly sacred to her and these birds were supposed to draw her chariot.

Iris is the personification of the rainbow. Since the rainbow, though clearly in the heavens, seems to arch down to earth, it is easy to imagine it as a bridge linking heaven and earth, and one along which a messenger can travel. The bridge and the messenger become one and Iris is pictured here as serving Juno, in particular. The "wat'ry arch" is, of course, the rainbow, which appears after a rain, when the air is full of water droplets.

The rainbow attribute of Iris is indicated by Ceres' first words when she enters:

> Hail, many-colored messenger. ..

—Act IV, scene i, line 76

> … dusky Dis…

Ceres has one reservation about attending the festivities. She says to Iris:

> Tell me, heavenly bow,
> If Venus or her son, as thou dost know,
> Do now attend the Queen? Since they did plot
> The means that dusky Dis my daughter got,
> Her and her blind boy's scandaled company
> I have forsworn.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 86-91

Dis is one of the Roman equivalents of the Greek god of the underworld, Pluto. Pluto seized Persephone, the daughter of Demeter (Ceres), and took her to the underworld to be his queen. Demeter located her only after a weary search and even then could only arrange to have her returned for part of each year. It is only in that part that Demeter allows the earth to bear crops; while Persephone is

underground the earth lies blasted and cold. (This is an obvious way of mythologizing the cycle of summer and whiter, see page I-5.)

Pluto would not have fallen in love with Persephone had he not been wounded by the arrows of blind Eros (Cupid), the son of Aphrodite (Venus), which is why Ceres holds her grudge.

> … towards Paphos.. .

Actually, Venus and her son have no place at the celebration. They are the personification of erotic love and Prospero has made it plain that Miranda is to remain a virgin until the marriage rites are fully performed. Iris says, therefore, of Venus:

> / met her Deity
> Cutting the clouds towards Paphos, and her son
> Dove-drawn with her.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 92-94

Paphos (see page I-15) was a city where Venus (Aphrodite) was particularly venerated.

> … they may prosperous be

Juno now enters and says to Ceres:

> Go with me
> To bless this twain, that they may prosperous be
> And honored in their issue.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 103-5

This "wedding masque," which occupies so much of the play, may have been deliberately inserted to apply to a real wedding at which *The Tempest* was to be shown; or else, since the wedding masque was there, the play was thought particularly appropriate for such a celebration.

At any rate, *The Tempest* seems to have had one of its early productions in the winter of 1612-13 as part of the festive preparations for the marriage of Elizabeth, the daughter of King James

I, with Frederick V of the Palatinate (son of the Frederick IV who was ridiculed by Portia in *The Merchant of Venice,* see page I-506).

The two were married in February 1613, both bride and bridegroom being seventeen years old. Juno's statement that they be "honored in their issue" came true, as it happened. The couple had thirteen children.

… called Naiades…

Juno and Ceres sing, and with that done, a dance must be next. For that purpose, Iris makes a new call:

> You nymphs, called Naiades, of the wandring brooks,
> With your sedged crowns and ever-harmless looks,
> Leave your crisp channels, and on this green land
> Answer your summons. ..

—Act IV, scene i, lines 128-31

The nymphs were the spirits of wild nature, pictured as beautiful young women. (The very word means "young woman.") These came in a number of varieties. The nymphs of the mountains were "oreads," those of the trees were "dryads," and those of the rivers and streams (whom Iris has called) are "naiads."

Properly speaking, if the nymphs were called, satyrs ought also to have been called, for they were the male counterpart, masculine spirits of the wild. However, the nymph-satyr association is an almost entirely erotic one (see page I-630), which we memorialize these days by the use of "nymphomania" and "satyriasis" as medical terms, and that would have been unsuitable for the celebration Prospero designed for the young people. Instead, harvestmen are called, and a chaste pastoral dance is staged.

… the great globe itself

At the conclusion of the dance, Prospero bethinks himself that Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo are plotting to kill him and realizes he must get back to business. He ends the masque and when the young couple look troubled, he says:

> These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

—Act IV, scene i, lines 148-58

This is a surprisingly somber speech for what is, essentially, a happy play, especially since it comes at a particularly happy time for Prospero, who sees the best part of his plan coming to such lovely fruition.

It is almost irresistibly tempting to think Shakespeare is talking to himself at this point. At the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* he was forty-seven years old, the prime of middle age by our standards, but quite old in his time. He may have felt the infirmity of the years creeping up on him and he may have been thinking more and more of death. As a matter of fact, he had only five more years left to live, for he died in 1616 at the age of only fifty-two.

These beautiful lines, then, may have been his thoughtful salute to his own inevitable death and to the end of all the "insubstantial pageants" he had invented.

It might also be viewed (without Shakespeare possibly being able to know) as an extraordinary prediction of the future life of the young couple whose real-life forthcoming nuptials were being celebrated. Young Elizabeth and Frederick, who were entering so happily into princely marriage and life, were to experience tragedy soon.

In 1619 Frederick was elected King of the Protestant nation of Bohernia (see page I-148), which was revolting against Catholic Austria. He was still only twenty-three and he could not resist the advance in title from Elector to King. This was the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, but one year of it was enough for poor Frederick. He was defeated at the Battle of the White Mountain near Prague on November 8, 1620 (four years after Shakespeare's death), and he spent the rest of his life as a landless refugee, living on a pension granted him by the Protestant Netherlands. He died in 1632.

His wife, Elizabeth, lived on long enough to see her brother,

Charles I, defeated by revolting Englishmen and executed in 1649. She did not return to England till 1661, when her nephew had become King as Charles II. She died the year after. For Frederick and Elizabeth, a short-lived happiness had indeed dissolved and left not a rack (cloud) behind.

And yet Juno's blessing did not go for nought (and here as elsewhere, see pages I-593 and II-192, Shakespeare's intuition led him into the making of true predictions). Frederick and Elizabeth were "honored in their issue." Not only did they have thirteen children, but one of them, Sophia, was the mother of the man who eventually became King George I of England. All the monarchs of England since 1714 have been descendants of Elizabeth and Frederick.

I'll break my staff

Caliban and the others do not prove to be hard to handle. Ariel has already lured them on through thorns arid swamps, and when they reach Prospero's cell, spirits in the shape of dogs are set to snarling at them and drive them away.

It remains only to settle matters with the King and the others, who, after the tantalizing episode of the banquet that came and then vanished, have been kept charmed into motionlessness till Prospero be ready for them.

Ariel is sorry for them and expresses his sympathy, and if Prospero has been meditating any final cruelty against his enemies he abandons it. He, a human, cannot be less kind than the inhuman Ariel.

Prospero announces that he will be satisfied to inflict no further punishment provided only the criminals are penitent. He has accomplished all he wants and it is no longer important to him that he possess his magic powers. There will be one last item to round out all and then, he says:

I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

—Act V, scene i, lines 54-57

Many critics seem to think that this is Shakespeare's farewell to his art. He is saying he will write no more and will no longer practice the matchless magic of his literary genius. (This is, in my opinion, too

sentimental an interpretation and I doubt it. For one thing, a compulsive writer like Shakespeare couldn't deliberately plan to give up writing while he was capable of holding a pen-on this one point I claim to be an authority. For another, he did continue to write in actual fact, engaging in two collaborative efforts with Fletcher: Henry Vlll and The Two Noble Kinsmen.)

… brave new world

Point by point, all is brought to a conclusion. The King and the others are brought in and are scolded and forgiven; while Gonzalo, at least, is praised and thanked. Prospero reveals his identity and takes back his dukedom.

What's more, Ferdinand (whom Alonso and the rest thought dead) is revealed, playing chess with Miranda-to Alonso's great joy.

Miranda, herself, is wide-eyed at all these men. She had never imagined there could be so many and she cries out in naive astonishment:

> O, wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave [splendid] new world
> That has such people in't!

—Act V, scene i, lines 181-84

The glad exclamation of Miranda has been made into part of our language in the form of a bitter sarcasm by Aldous Huxley, who in 1932 published his book *Brave New World,* which pictures a future society that has been completely saturated with scientific technology but at the loss of all the human values we hold dear.

And now the crew of the ship arrive with the amazing news that despite all appearance, the vessel is in perfect shape and that not a man has been lost. Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo also enter and are forgiven as having been sufficiently punished.

All are to go aboard the ship, which Ariel shall speed so that it will rejoin the fleet, and then he, himself, will be free at last.

It is a happy ending in which not one person, not one, not even the most: villainous one, Antonio, comes to any physical harm. It is as though Shakespeare in his last complete play could not leave the boards without everyone entirely happy.